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MY COUSIN MISS CINDERELLA

(MA COUSINE POT-AU-FEU)

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF
LEON DE TINSEAU

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TRANSLATOR OF "THE STORY OF COLETTE"

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MY COUSIN, MISS CINDERELLA.

I.

My parents sent me, later than is usual, to the school at Poitiers, kept by Jesuits—do you understand, "by Jesuits"?—which does not hinder the fact that the mere suggestion that I should take my first communion anywhere but at home, made my mother very indignant Let me hasten to add that her indignation was of short duration, for the question was settled as she wished. My father loved this best and most pious of women devotedly, but I think he loved peace and quiet nearly as well. To escape a discussion he would even have gone to America, though he confessed that he had never set foot on anything afloat, except the little boat from which he and the game-keeper shot ducks in winter.

He was married some time after he was

thirty years old, for at that time we were never in a hurry. This marriage, happy as it was, was certainly the only noteworthy event of his life since the day when he would naturally have become a soldier, as, from the time of St. Louis all the Vandelnays in the world had been, when they were not in orders. But the revolution of 1830 had put an end to this custom, and my grandparents, as well as their son, would have considered the name compromised if one of the family had passed even a quarter of an hour in the service of Louis Philippe.

I suppose that my father must have passed some lonely hours when he came back to Vandelnay after two years spent at school, where life was certainly less sad and severe. If so, he accepted it like a philosopher, that is to say, with resignation, for at the time when we began to be intimate—I mean when I was five or six years old—this resignation was perfect.

At this time we were eight in number at Vandelnay—I mean eight "masters," to employ the usual expression, though the title only belonged in reality to one of the inhabitants of

the château, my grandfather, even then very old, but astonishingly well preserved. Besides my grandfather, there was a younger brother, and two sisters who were older—all three unmarried, and my grandmother, to whom we all looked up as to a wonderful being ; for, as a child she had been in the prisons of the Terror. These composed a sort of council of ancients, honored with certain prerogatives. In my frequent conversations with myself, having no one else to talk with, I designated these persons as the "ancestors."

The three other inhabitants of the château —that is to say, my parents and myself—formed an inferior caste, excluded from all part in the government, even in the examination of business. But, as in all well-constituted monarchies, each of the inhabitants of Vandelnay, though submissive and obedient to those above him, was listened to by those beneath him as a representative of the supreme authority.

This discipline, harmonious, because perfect, which still excites my admiration and regrets when I think of it, manifested itself even in the numerous orders of servants, some of whom were so old that they were more a care

than a help. But it was the rule at Vandelnay that a servant left the house only in his coffin or for some grave offense, two phenomena about equally rare, thanks to the good air and food and to the subordination which reigned in the château and its dependencies.

To return to the "masters," I was, it is unnecessary to say, the only one whose duty was always to obey, never to command. Of course, I speak of recognized authority, for I really exercised a secret tyranny over all the servants, except the cook and the gardener, who were very unmanageable, probably on account of their special knowledge.

To go into the kitchen without passport from competent authority was punished by a dish-cloth attached to my waist. As for the gardens, the part reserved for fruit was a real theatre of war for me, constantly infested by the presence of the enemy—the gardener—where I never ventured without the ruses of an Apache. And what a joy it was when I could taste the stolen unripe fruit of the peach-trees or the acid pulp of the grapes! One of the most vivid remembrances of my childhood is of a certain autumn when the country was deci-

mated by cholera. The general terror was such that all the fruits considered dangerous were left to rot on the trees. Such was my good fortune, that of all the household, the only one who took the disease was my enemy the gardener, from which, happily, he recovered. But during those three delightful weeks I consumed more plums and apricots than in all my past or after life. The doctors must forgive me—for if the fruit did not kill me it was certainly not my fault.

In the regular order of nature I was under the direct authority of my mother, who was herself, apparently, subject to the authority of her husband. I have strong reasons for suspecting that this apparent submission concealed a very different reality, for I have known few more beautiful women or more tender husbands. Except some solemn reproofs, made necessary by a grave fault, which impressed me deeply for at least forty-eight hours, my father interfered with my life only during two or three hours in the afternoon, when I went out with him on foot or driving, and, when I was old enough, on horseback. I think it is rarely possible to have at once such respect,

fear, and love, as I had for him. It seemed as if he united several systems of education in his person. Severe, unapproachable, rarely smiling when we were in the vicinity of the château or park, he began to unbend and to descend from his level as soon as we got beyond the last trees of the avenue. When the pointed towers were out of sight, he was gay, affectionate, caressing, hardly older than I was—a companion who did exactly as I wished, but to whom in my demands I did not give credit, for when we were once at home, a wish which he would at once have gratified before we got there, was as impossible to obtain as if I had asked for the moon.

I rarely saw the older generation except at meal-time, and these for me were the most terrible hours of the day. At eleven o'clock all the family met in the dining-room. My grandfather, of course, sat at the head of the table, having one of his sisters on each side. They were older than he and unmarried, as after the catastrophe of '93 husbands of noble race were hard to find. They were nearly ninety years old, and I shall astonish no one in saying that they were not particularly re-

markable for their amiability. Tall, majestic, perfectly erect, one a brunette, the other a blonde (I was nearly fifteen years old when I discovered that they wore wigs), they seemed each to remember but one thing of all their past experiences. The elder had had the honor of opening the ball at Poitiers with monsieur, the brother of the king, at the time of the restoration of the Bourbons. The other had aided the Duchess de Berri in a difficult situation, in 1832, taking her past the troops of Louis Philippe in her carriage. Twenty times I have shuddered at the recital of this odyssy which ended happily, thanks to my aunt's presence of mind, which at the critical moment had dissipated the soldiers' suspicions by ordering the princess, who was disguised as a waiting-maid, to tie her shoe—a thing of which she was not a little proud.

Their brother, who sat on the other side of the table, at the right of my grandmother, was hardly seventy years old. For this reason they treated him like a young man who had never done anything very useful, for during the first forty years of his life he had traveled all over Europe. My Uncle John as-

sumed the airs of an artist, and professed an independence of judgment with regard to the latest events in our national history that was then learned in foreign countries, but which one could learn now without going away from home. Besides, he sometimes spoke of certain beautiful women whom he had known. He was certainly discreet—I never heard him pronounce a name—for he preserved a strict reserve, and his reminiscences would seem commonplace and trivial in contrast with the confidences made in recreation hours by the older classes in our schools of to-day. Nevertheless, I quite understood that his sisters and sister-in-law looked upon him as a wild young fellow, whose tenets as regarding religion, politics, and manners, must be accepted with caution.

For this unavowed reason it was not without secret anxiety that the "ancestors" saw my private talks with him, and, without seeming to do so, they discouraged them as much as possible. As was to be foreseen, there was nothing I liked better in the world than to hear my Uncle John's stories.

One day when I was climbing on his knees

and running my hands through his hair, I felt something like a hollow in his head.

"What made that, uncle?" I asked.

"A pistol-ball."

"Ah! why were you shot at with a pistol?"

"Because I fought."

"Against the enemy?"

"No; against a gentleman."

"What had he done to you?"

"You are too young to understand. But unless you want to make trouble for me, take care neither to speak of it nor of what I have told you to any one."

Very many years passed before I spoke to any one of my uncle's wound or knew what the gentleman had against him.

Child as I was, I already understood that there was a mystery about my Uncle John, which placed him, as it were, apart from the rest of the family. He was separated from them by a persistent melancholy, not certainly that the others were gay—it would have been as true to say that they were dissipated or gamblers—but his absolute sadness was far deeper than the absence of gayety, which was the normal state of the rest of the family. In

the midst of this empty silence, of persons who did not speak because they had no thoughts, the solemn, dreamy silence of this man, whose intelligence struck even me, produced the contrast of light to darkness, of heat to cold, of life to death.

Besides, it was only necessary to see his strongly marked, worn countenance, often traversed by sudden gleams of emotion, immediately repressed, to understand that Uncle John differed from his relations of both sexes in having a history, which he was resolved to conceal. It was at him that I looked the most willingly during our long repasts—for octogenarians eat slowly—and when I look back to those days, to the guests in the big dining-room of Vandelnay, they seem to me like funereal statues, with only one whose eyes were bright with life.

Of all the inhabitants of the château, my father and my Uncle John were the two who had the least in common. Disputes were not rare between them, and I must confess that it was my uncle who generally began, without any very good reason, as is the case when there is want of sympathy between two per-

sons. I understand now that my Uncle John reproached his nephew with leading an idle, useless life. But in perfectly good faith my father considered this renunciation of the active life of the day as a sacrifice full of merit.

"We ought to obey the king!"

How many times I have heard this phrase, which filled me with enthusiasm all the greater that I did not understand it! In spite of myself, my serenity was disturbed by the sad smile which I saw on my uncle's face at such moments. Sometimes he did not content himself with smiling. Two or three short sentences, without signification for me, were exchanged, after which, as soon as he could get away, the baron retired to his room like a general-in-chief who, surrounded by superior forces, manœuvres on unfavorable ground. At long intervals, he left Vandelnay for some days with one of his few friends on the pretext of hunting or fishing. Apparently, he was poor, and he seemed to take pleasure in saying so to any one who would listen. And this poverty was another of the things which surprised me! How can my Uncle John be poor? He eats and dresses as we do, lives in the same

château, rides in the same carriages—rarely, it is true; bears the same name!

Such were some of the questions which tormented my young brain, and which I would have liked to ask. But I kept them back, as well as many others, knowing by experience that I was not allowed to ask questions, and shrinking from what is even now the greatest of trials for me, the refusal to grant a wish of mine by a person I love. After all, it is not so very hard to be silent.

II.

EVERY evening at Vandelnay, toward the middle of the "master's" dessert, the bell of the château was rung, and the servants assembled in the stone-paved hall that served as their dining-room. Five minutes later my grandmother left her place, and, followed by us all, traversed the immense gallery which separated our apartments from those of the servants. In winter it was a real journey, full of dangers, because of the differences of temperature and the currents of air; a journey which required many precautions in the form of wraps, cloaks, shawls, and hats, according to the sex and age. The gallery traversed, the procession majestically entered the hall, where the servants' supper was spread on a long table, lighted by primitive brass lamps formed of a cup of oil in which a wick was burning. All the servants, about fifteen, waited standing

for us. The family knelt on wooden chairs placed against the wall, which was yellow with smoke, turning their backs to the table. On the other side of it the servants knelt on the stone floor, having directly in front of them the line of earthen plates and cups on the table, and, farther on, the backs of three generations of Vandelnays, succeeding to so many others who doubtless had prayed in the same place, in the same way, for four or five hundred years.

My grandfather recited the prayers and litanies aloud, masters and servants devoutly responding in unison. When the final sign of the cross was made, there were a few minutes' conversation between certain members of the family and the chiefs of the service, so to speak, for the simple domestic soldiers (grooms, scullery-maids, and under-seamstresses) retired into corners until the moment when the soup, already smoking in the huge tureen, should be distributed by the strong hand of the cook. During these few minutes the work of the following day was arranged. My grandfather conferred with the game-keeper; my father gave his orders to the coachman; my mother asked the

gardener about the fruit and flowers—he, my enemy, who had solemnly sworn in the morning to denounce me in the evening, and who, good man, never did it! But what frightful moments I passed, and how well I understood the glances of the tyrant who had me at his mercy! Occasionally, my grandfather, raising his voice, would make the official announcement of some family event, recommending decent behavior at the village festival next day, deploring a misfortune at some farm—hail, sickness among the cattle, or the conscription fallen on an eldest son—"and now, good-night my friends," he would conclude—on the days when he was in good humor.

And the answer always came almost in a whisper—a respectful murmur:

"Good-night, Monsieur le Marquis."

Then we returned to the *salon* through the Siberia of the long corridor, where knights shivered under their armor and ladies in their hoops. Near the big fire we found my aunts, who, poor things, had no orders to give, only possessing in this world—I have since learned why—what they took with all simplicity from the generosity of my grandfather.

We also found my Uncle John there, for he never joined in the evening prayer, a circumstance so full of mystery in my eyes that I never had the courage to ask a question about it. But if I said nothing, I observed the more, and the facts I saw perplexed me about the orthodoxy of my Uncle John.

On Sunday, it is true, he never failed to go to mass, and even waited impatiently for the moment to set out, it being one of his small weaknesses to be always ready half an hour too soon. But he slept through the sermon, and it required a strong disposition to sleep to be able to do it on the oak, polished by ages, of the armorial family pew.

At the end of twenty minutes my Uncle John always awoke, a circumstance which generally coincided with the end of the homily. But if our good curé had been carried away by his own eloquence, and exceeded the time, the baron drew an enormous repeater from his pocket and sounded it, so that it could be heard from one end of the church to the other.

At this well-known signal, which always caused an emotion in the pious assembly, the poor Abbé Cassard turned his back to the al-

tar, leaving us all to the mercy of the storm, without taking time to conduct us to the door of the sacred edifice, to which happily we all knew the way.

From Easter-even to the second Sunday after Easter, this recalcitrant hearer invariably disappeared, without any one being able to tell the object of his journey, so that it was impossible to answer the question—Will Uncle John keep Easter?

Certainly the village curé, who dined at the château every Sunday, treated him not only with consideration, but respect. What was more remarkable still, during the game of whist, which was always played on that day after dinner, and of which, as you may imagine, I only saw the beginning, my uncle did not spare the abbé, when he was his partner, the most severe reprimands. For the baron was celebrated in the whole province for having learned whist in England, just as he had learned to waltz in Germany and studied painting in Italy. "In spite of all," I said to myself, "a hardened sinner could not have inspired such esteem in a priest, and above all a sinner would not have abused the priest when he trumped his best card."

III.

I WAS nearly twelve years old, and the curé was preparing me for my first communion at the same time that he taught me Greek and Latin, when the first event happened which disturbed the monotonous peace which since my birth had reigned over the château. One morning, although Easter-even was still far off, my Uncle John's place was empty at table, and I was told that he had left in the night for England. All day long the family was a prey to the greatest anxiety. My grandfather was at the same time out of temper and deeply moved; my grandmother and her sisters-in-law had red eyes and uttered deep sighs. They passed the greater part of the time kneeling before the altar of the Virgin, on which a huge wax-candle was burning.

Faithful to my system, I asked no questions,

but waited with impatience for the hour of prayer, supposing that we should have a message from the government, that is to say, a communication of some sort addressed by my grandfather to the family.

Even to-day I shudder when I remember our dinner that day in the big dining-room, chilly with the first November days. It was not, as one might have supposed, that all remained in contemplation before empty plates. The Vandelnays, of an old and strong race, had nothing in common — especially then — with anæmics of to-day, whose appetites are gone if they have lost two louis at the races, or if a beautiful woman has looked coldly on them. We could eat, thank God! But we ate on this day in the midst of a deathlike silence, broken only by the creaking of the parquet floor under the felt shoes of the servants. The "ancestors" were so absorbed that I—a thing unknown before — could refuse spinach without calling down upon myself the sophistical argument before which I had so often yielded—not without longing with all my heart for the age when I could do as I liked:

"If you do not eat spinach, it is that you are

not hungry; if you are not hungry, you can eat no dessert."

Alas, the irony of human nature! Long years have passed since I was my own master. I am passionately fond of spinach, and dessert has no attraction for me. The sweets of life are long past!

The dinner ended, and we started as usual for our "Siberia," about as gay as the son of Theseus, when that unfortunate prince took his last walk. As we went, my grandmother seemed to be begging some favor of her husband, and, as far as I could judge, without success. I heard her insist:

"After all, my dear, she is a Christian, and our niece!"

In the hall, everything passed as usual. But after the last prayer, instead of making the final sign of the cross, my grandfather remained for some minutes kneeling on his chair. He seemed to be struggling with himself. Suddenly lifting his head, he said in an unsteady voice:

"We will recite a *Pater* and *ave* for a sick person, a member of the family."

That was all. But by the use of handkerchiefs behind, among the servants, I understood

that the young Antoine Rene-Gaston de Vandelnay, was the only one present who did not know who the sick person was.

Others in my place might not have been able to refrain any longer from asking questions. With me, although my best friends accuse me of obstinacy, the result was different. I would have seen the château demolished stone by stone, without asking the cause of the catastrophe. At the bottom of my heart, I believed that the explanations would come of themselves —in which I was deceived. Evidently my proud silence suited everybody.

Two days passed thus, with successive wax-candles in the chapel and renewed "*Paters*" at evening prayer. The third day a telegram arrived early in the morning, and all the family—myself, of course, excepted—met immediately in my grandmother's room—an unheard-of proceeding, for, between the hours of mass and breakfast, this sanctuary was never open, except to the cook, the housekeeper, the man who did errands in town, or the sisters who took care of the poor and the sick of the village. But on that day all our habits seemed to be upset; breakfast was a quarter of an hour

late, and my mother started for Poitiers after a long conversation with her mother-in-law and aunts. Merino, crape, black cloth, dressmaker, milliner, gloves — these significant words had struck my ears for an hour. Some near relation was dead. But who? It was not my uncle, for I had heard this phrase pronounced by my grandmother:

"I think poor John will return at once."

In the evening my grandfather said, as his only funeral oration:

"We will recite a *De profundis* for my niece, who will be buried to-morrow in England."

At the words "*De profundis*," some carefully repressed sobs were heard, but not among the "masters." To judge from appearances, my grandmother and my aunts had wept all their tears in their rooms, for their eyes were very red; but to weep before servants would have been a weakness unworthy of them.

As for me, I knew now that a relative had just died in England, but that was all. The degree of relationship, the name, age, and station in life of the person were all so many mysteries for me. At the bottom of my heart I resented the ignorance in which I was left. In

the evening, when I was undressed, my mother made me try on a suit of mourning. This was the last drop; I could contain myself no longer.

"Doubtless," I said, "this is the first time that one has put on mourning without knowing even the name of the dead person."

"What!" my mother exclaimed; "has no one told you?"

"No," I replied; "but I ask no questions. Other people may keep their secrets; I will keep mine—when I have any."

The threat was not dangerous; but my mother felt emotion, perhaps remorse, for, taking me on her knees and putting her arms around me, "My dear child," she repeated, "they have told you nothing! It is that we have all been so troubled and sorry for your poor Uncle John."

"But who is dead?" I said, giving up for once my cherished pride.

"It is his daughter who is dead."

"My Uncle John was married?"

My poor mother raised her eyes to heaven with the despairing agony of a sailor, who, driven among rocks, looks for the lighthouse that will guide him to a harbor.

"He was married a long time ago," she said. "Your aunt has been dead for many years. She left an only daughter, who has just died."

"Why is it, then," I asked, resolved, now I had begun, to know all, "how is it, then, that no one has ever told me of the life and death of my aunt? What was her name? Did she not live at Vandelnay?"

The idea of a member of the family who lived anywhere else than in the château, but, above all, the idea of Uncle John, married and a father, plunged me in astonishment. My mother replied:

"Your uncle, while he was in Italy, married an Italian. Your aunt never came here. No member of the family ever saw her."

"But her daughter—the one who has just died?" I asked.

"We have never seen her. You must never speak of her, especially to your uncle."

I naturally prepared to ask why, but I saw in my mother's face such a dread of this question that, for the moment, I gave it up; besides, I had sufficient food for thought in the events of the past four days and the facts

I had just learned. I had a profound love for my mother, and, even without the rigid discipline in which I had been brought up, the fear of displeasing her would have closed my lips. Feigning a calm which I certainly did not feel, I replied:

"Very well, mamma, I will say nothing. You may trust me."

One of those sweetest of kisses, so much regretted when they fail us, recompensed me for my submission, and I pretended to go to sleep; but all night I could not close my eyes, and, in the darkness of my room, I seemed to see the wife of Uncle John, the Italian, whom no member of the family had ever seen. I pictured her to myself like something in one of my books—very dark, with big black eyes, and heavy braids of hair with two pins with large gold heads. I saw her distinctly, with a white cloth folded square on her head, her coral necklace, her white bodice with puffed sleeves, and the basket of flowers, which she probably carried for her own pleasure, for it was impossible for me to admit that the Baroness de Vandelnay would sell roses like an ordinary Italian.

As the day was breaking I fell asleep for an

hour, and when they came to waken me for the mass, in which all the inhabitants of the château joined every morning, it seemed to me that all I had heard and thought was a complicated, fatiguing dream.

But a quarter of an hour later when I saw every one in mourning and the mourning emblems on the curé's shoulders, whose acolyte I was, I had to accept the fact.

Except the absence of my Uncle John, our black clothes, and a greater strictness of discipline, there was no evidence that the Vandelnays had just lost a near relative; and my poor cousin—I should have found it difficult to name her—scarcely had more notice after than before her death.

But this calm was treacherous, and not to last.

IV.

Two days after, an hour before dinner, I was in the vestibule occupied in manœuvring my leaden soldiers, when a carriage stopped before the door. By the cracked sound of the bells I recognized a carriage from the town. I hurried out, leaving my soldiers to take care of themselves, to see what unexpected visitor could be coming so late. I had completely forgotten my Uncle John, who had now been gone for more than a week. It was he; but I recognized him with difficulty, he was so wrapped up in coats and scarfs. Besides, I must confess that, even superficially as I knew his history, he no longer seemed to me the same man. Thus, it was with a certain timidity that I went toward him to bid him welcome; but he scarcely seemed to see me.

"How do you do! How do you do?" he replied, turning his back to me to take from the

somber depths of the carriage a heavy parcel, which was given him by an almost invisible shadow.

He went up the steps without difficulty, while the shadow, a feminine shadow, as nearly as I could make out, got out of the carriage.

"Open the door of the *salon* for me," he ordered, briefly.

I obeyed; we entered the large room, which was dimly lighted by a shaded lamp placed in the middle of a table. My uncle went to a sofa upon which he deposited his burden, and drawing aside some folds I saw—you may imagine with what surprise—a little girl asleep.

It was with difficulty that I refrained from an exclamation of fright, first, because the child in her immobility looked as if she might be dead, and also because my uncle, who a week before was noted for his youthful appearance, seemed suddenly to have aged twenty years. He was bent and deformed and broken, so to speak, as my leaden soldiers were when I accidentally stepped on them. His handsome face, which before had expressed an energy which some people considered too haughty, now expressed a kind of sad humility, a distrust of

himself and of everything, heart-rending even to so careless an observer as I was. I stood there with my mouth and eyes open, not knowing what to do or say, more sad than curious, feeling that in a minute or two more I should burst into tears.

Happily my uncle said, in what appeared to me a hard voice:

"Go up to your grandmother's room, and ask her to come here quite alone; quite alone, do you hear? Go quickly, and say nothing more."

I went bounding up the long staircase. I seemed very important to myself, because of the part which I was accidentally playing in what appeared to me an astonishing drama, and weak, on account of the sentiment I had of my own incapacity to grapple with such extraordinary events.

"Grandmother," I cried, out of breath, and forgetting the respectful etiquette which was the rule at Vandelnay, "you must go down to the *salon* quick, quick! And above all, go alone. Oh, if you only knew . . . "

If such a message had been so delivered to a young woman she would probably have fallen

in hysterics. But my valiant grandmother, like many of her contemporaries, had seen a part of many sad scenes. She rose, put in her pocket something which was probably her rosary, and asked me:

"What is it? A visit?"

"My Uncle John!" I answered, putting my finger on my lips, and speaking almost in a whisper.

Then I went out, or rather I fled, as the best means of not being obliged to say any more. In my heart I was delighted to see the parts reversed. Now it was I who left the others in ignorance, refusing to answer their questions.

To tell the truth, there was no great merit in answering. Where did this little girl come from? Each time that Uncle John came back from a journey he brought some foreign animal, which was generally unwelcome—canaries from Holland, marmots from the Alps, dogs from the Pyrenees, turtles from Egypt, monkeys from Algiers—I had seen all these specimens of the animal kingdom appear with his luggage. But a little girl! that was a novelty, and as I came down the stairs, leaving the doors open behind

me, for decidedly anarchy reigned, I asked myself:

"Will they make her a cage, to which I shall go to feed her with milk and lettuce-leaves during my play-hours?"

When I returned to the room, Uncle John's new acquisition was still asleep, and he was kneeling before the sofa, eagerly watching it. From time to time he exchanged unintelligible sounds with a young woman of modest appearance, on whose head was a strange object in black straw, who was also watching the child, without paying any more attention to her surroundings—even to my humble person—than if she had lived there for ten years. Uncle John, radiant and absorbed, seemed in an ecstasy of prayer, and I could not help reflecting that I had never seen him so reverential, even on Sunday at the moment of the elevation of the host.

We stood like the animals in the stable around the infant Jesus when my grandmother appeared. My uncle, still kneeling, turned slightly, so that it seemed to be to the châtelaine of Vandelnay that he addressed his prayer.

"Sister," he said, in a gentle, timorous voice—and as he spoke I could see the trace

left by the pistol-ball on his head—"*she* had a little girl. Will you, in the name of the God you worship, receive the poor little orphan under your roof?"

Since then I have seen in women's eyes flashes of the passions, tendernesses, or enthusiasms which make them frightful or sublime. I have never seen goodness, compassion, the gentle light of charity, so completely beautify a countenance. Oh, my grandmother, how deeply I thank you for having made my blonde head understand something to which my gray head still holds, though it has thrown away so many other articles of men's creeds! Yes, of all the reasons for worshiping women, the strongest is their goodness—when they are good.

It would have been impossible to have reached the age of eleven in a château of Poiton under the second republic, without having read stories of children who had been received and taken care of by charitable souls; and surely a more charitable soul than the Marchioness of Vandelnay could not have been found from Tours to Angoulême.

I of course expected, above all, after the look I had seen, to see my grandmother take

her niece to her arms, for I quite understood that it was her niece and my own cousin who was sleeping there the resigned sleep of the lamb separated from its mother. I wanted to cry out to my uncle:

"Rise! it seems too much as if you prayed for some difficult thing!"

Probably the poor baron knew better than I did the difficulty of the thing he asked, for he remained on his knees, partly looking at the child who gave signs of waking, and partly at my grandmother who seemed to reflect. Ah! if any one had told me the day before that "our mistress," as the villagers called her, would required time for reflection before receiving—not an orphan of the blood of Vandelnay—but even the child of the most miserable beggar!

As if to gain time, my grandmother asked this question, which, under the circumstances, seemed to me useless:

"My poor John, why did you not tell us that *she* had a daughter?"

My uncle replied, pressing his lips together as if he would crush the words as they came out.

"Simply because I did not know it."

"Poor little dear; she looks like you."

I had always considered the judgments of my grandmother as infallible; but for once doubt entered into my soul. If this little rosy face, surrounded by tangled black hair, resembled the parchment-colored visage with a gray mustache, surmounted by short hair which stood on end, one might as well say that I was like the horned devils sculptured over the great door of Saint Radegonde.

"Wait for me," said my grandmother, suddenly; "I must speak to him who is master here. Let us hope that he will consent."

While they were speaking the child had awakened, and without moving, was turning her big, frightened eyes all about, eyes that were so black that I thought them like little balls of coal in milk. My grandmother asked:

"What is the child's name?"

"Rosamonde."

I saw that this strange name did not produce a favorable impression on the listener. Nevertheless, the châtelaine leaned tenderly over her little neice to kiss her; but the

child, at the sight of the strange face so near her own, began to cry.

"For heaven's sake, make her keep still," cried my grandmother, as she drew back, rather discouraged.

I thought to myself:

"Rosamonde, my dear, you are doing a very stupid thing for your first appearance at Vandelnay, not to wish to kiss grandmother!"

Already the woman with the black straw hat had gone to her charge, and was trying, in her strange language, to quiet her.

"Wait for me," repeated my grandmother. "I am going to speak to my husband. Gaston, go and work at your lessons until dinner-time."

V.

WHILE I worked at my lessons I listened, so as to try to guess what would be the fate of poor Rosamonde; for the château was so vast that a funeral and a ball might have been taking place at the two extremities without their respective guests being aware of one another's presence.

But when I entered the large dining-room an hour later, I understood that all had been happily arranged. Miss Rosamonde was already seated in a high-chair—formerly my property—at the other end of the table. The discipline of Vandelnay was such that each one seated himself without seeming to notice the new comer, who, on the contrary, examined all these new faces with a kind of fright, happily in silence. Served by her nurse, she ate quietly and with good appetite, watched surreptitiously by eight pairs of eyes, or, more

strictly speaking, seven, for the head of the family never once turned toward the poor child. At length I was alarmed to see that she fell asleep, for I well knew, by experience, the penalties of such an infraction of discipline. I wished that I could be at her side to pinch her, so as to spare her the troubles which were before her. But evidently an amnesty had been pronounced for this first evening, for no one seemed to see the offense. When the time came to go to the hall for prayers, my uncle said a few words in English — I have learned the language since then—to his granddaughter's nurse, who awakened her gently.

Then they all three went toward the door to the right, which led to the apartments, while the rest of the family went to that to the left, opening on the gallery. At this moment the storm which had been averted broke out when we least expected it. My grandfather stopped short, and, turning toward the group of three, he asked, in a voice which we rarely heard, but which always caused me to tremble in all my members:

"Why does not this child come to pray with the rest of us?"

A slight emotion showed itself on my Uncle John's face, as if he saw a danger. He answered in these words, which were distinctly heard in the general silence:

"Because she is Protestant, brother."

It is absolutely certain that such words had never before been heard in the château. God forbid that I should revive remembrances over which the dust of generations, become indifferent, has accumulated! If I have reason to be proud of the history of the Vandelnays of all ages, I do not fear to confess that there are many episodes due to a religion opposed to that professed by poor Rosamonde which I would willingly see effaced. My ancestors were not lukewarm when they struck in the name of the king; but when there was a question of religion they did not spare, and woe to him who was opposed to them! In those times I would not have given much for the life of a member of the family if he had ventured to make such a profession of faith as that I had just heard. But years had passed, and the reign of Louis Philippe bore but a slight resemblance to that of Charles IX or Louis XIV.

But my grandfather had hardly got beyond

the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, for, since the taking of the Bastile, which happened when he was twenty-five years old, the clock of time seemed to have stood still for the inhabitants of the château, as happens in houses shaken by an earthquake.

It is probable that the dear old man was hardly more shaken by the news of the death of Louis XVI than he was on the memorable evening when he learned that his brother's granddaughter was a heretic. It is needless to say that, at that time, I was incapable of making such reflections, but I remember vividly to-day the shudder which passed through me at the look which the head of the family cast at the innocent renegade. Fortunately, in that generation one kept his presence of mind, even before the scaffold.

My grandfather did not utter a word; doubtless he feared to say something which would be irreparable, and he wished to reflect before giving sentence. The troop of the faithful resumed its march toward the promised land of the hall for the prayer, preceded by old François, carrying one of the lamps. The rebellious trio took its way to the desert of the

salon, and, as I was rather learned in Bible history, I could not help thinking of Hagar disappearing with her son in the depths of the solitary desert.

The prayers proceeded as usual, only that my grandfather prolonged his self-examination beyond all bounds. Not at that time having sins enough to occupy me so long, I thought of my little cousin.

"Poor little thing!" I said to myself. "How terrible it is to think that she must burn in hell forever, while all who are kneeling here, on the chairs or on the floor—I trust God will pardon even my enemy the gardener—will be enjoying all the happiness of paradise!"

As may be seen, my theology was of the most primitive, and I condemned poor Rosamonde simply because she was a heretic. But her lot in this world was less easy to decide.

"They will never allow her," I thought "to pass the night under this roof. What will become of her? On what stone, under the shelter of what tree, will she rest her head? What a strange idea to be a Protestant!"

I returned to the *salon* with the rest of the

family, my heart oppressed, expecting some terrible sentence. Fortunately neither Hagar nor Ishmael, that is to say neither Uncle John, Rosamonde, nor her nurse, were in that desert. I may even say, in justice to the family, that they all, my grandfather at the head, seemed to share my satisfaction. In spite of all I have said, the good old man would have been horribly unhappy, I am sure, if he had been obliged to begin a night of St. Bartholomew of his own by putting his grand-niece out-of-doors. The other members of the family, even the "ancestors," were not more fanatical, and every one was careful not to make the slightest allusion to the drama of the evening. For my own part, I did not even whisper a word to a living being until the moment when I found myself alone with my old Justine.

"Where is *she*," I asked, in a low voice, as if our walls had not the best of reasons for being deaf.

"Poor little thing, she is already asleep. Madame la mère had a bed prepared for her in the second story of the tower, above the baron's rooms. We all went up by the back staircase to see her, but the baron was at the door,

and would not let any one pass. He is like a lion defending its young."

I could not help wondering whether Justine had ever seen a lion in the exercise of its fatherly duties, but the force of the comparison struck my imagination. All night I dreamed of Rosamonde. I saw her asleep under a tree, doubtless a palm, guarded by a monster with a bristling mane, but which had the eyes and mustache of my Uncle John.

At the moment when I write, she still rests, my precious one, not far from the tower where she slept so well that night, and it is still Uncle John who guards her.

How many joys and sorrows, tears and smiles, between these two sleeps! Poor dear Uncle John, watch well over the orphan, until another takes the place to keep guard over her who was so loved!

VI.

STRONG governments do not permit the disturbances to be seen by the outside world which, without threatening their existence, are sometimes inevitable. Vigorous repressions, prudent concessions or reforms, all are accomplished without noise or effort, and even the appearance of new and important personages only inspires healthy curiosity in the citizens.

Thus it was at Vandelnay. I never knew, and never shall know what explanations were exchanged between Uncle John and his brother. Was the discussion violent, or did the sovereign authority yield easily? Was it necessary for the counselors of the crown to interfere? The echoes of my grandmother's cabinet, sleeping long ago, alone could tell me now, for this boudoir had thick doors, and the "ancestors" in their most excited moments always used the calm tones of good society. All that I know is,

that the next day, on the stroke of eleven, the baron took his place at table, holding Rosie by the hand, and followed by the inevitable 'Lisbeth.

The pretty English diminutive Rosie, which was employed from that time on by my uncle when he spoke of his granddaughter, was adopted by the "young," that is to say, by my parents and myself. The servants, except the cook who was always on the side of the "ancestors," did the same.

These last, up to their latest breath, never called their young relative anything but Rosamonde—never sparing a letter.

In reflecting about it—and I have had only too much opportunity for reflection since the time of which I speak—I have wondered if the poor child would not have been happier in no matter what orphan asylum than she was at Vandelnay, at least in the early days. In this old manor life was dull even for me, the spoiled darling of the house. My grandfather and his sisters professed a ferocious hatred against the English, of which our natural antipathy to-day can give but a faint idea. If one adds to this the fact that the name alone of heretic caused

their eyes to reflect the light of the funeral pile of Jeanne d'Arc, and, nearer our own times, the bloody flames kindled at Vandelnay by Admiral Coligni during the wars of religion under the reign of Charles IX.

As a matter of course, my ardor was increased by my historical studies — perhaps slightly prejudiced—and I shared these doctrines. Fortunately, my grandmother was a saint, incapable of hating any one, and my parents, although, judging more calmly because they belonged to a younger generation, held themselves aloof in a pitying neutrality.

It is not the less true that if there was a spot in the world where my cousin ought not to have put her foot, it was Vandelnay. But apparently, for reasons unknown to me, my uncle was not free to choose a home for his granddaughter. It was therefore necessary that all should agree to live together in a way that strongly resembled the dwelling of prisoners-of-war in an enemy's country — a resemblance made stronger by the fact that Rosie did not know a word of our language.

As things went, it seemed probable that she might grow up without being more learned in

this respect; for my uncle, who spent several hours of each day in teaching her, seemed to have a certain pride in never allowing either the child or her nurse to hear a word of French.

As for me, I only saw her at the hours of meals, at least during the first days. She ate little, partly, I suppose, from fright, and partly because the cooking at Vandelnay, though irreproachable, was entirely different from what she had been used to. But if she was not remarkable for her appetite, she was for her correct manners, which, it is not much to say, surpassed mine. Once I was reprimanded thus by my grandfather:

"I am sorry to say that you are not nearly so neat at table as your cousin."

The sadness of her experiences of life, which was already painted on this baby face, was pitiful to see. Very soon Rosie showed a passionate affection for her grandfather, very natural under the circumstances. From time to time she looked at him with deep tenderness—and I may add that my uncle returned her love with usury. He was at once gloomy and happy; we hardly saw him, his life being passed in the apartments

of the tower, which became an asylum for that branch of the family, or, if the weather permitted, in some quiet part of the park. There he would sit for hours watching the child as she played in the sand of the paths. I watched them, sometimes almost with envy, not daring to disturb their tranquillity. When the child's wooden spade had gone too deep, it was touching to see with what melancholy care Uncle John would repair the damage before going back to the château.

"We are not at home," he seemed to say in a low voice, as he bent his tall, thin person over his work.

My personal sentiments for my cousin were for a long time those of the most profound disdain; for, like most boys of my age, I considered that girls belong to an inferior category of human beings. Morning and evening, it is true, Rosie and I kissed each other as we kissed every member of the family, which made sixteen kisses a day given and received by each of us, without counting the extras.

But what a difference in the manner in which we accomplished this ceremony! One would have said that this caress, which with

me was perfectly mechanical, was a great boon which I deigned to accord and which my cousin received with gratitude. When my lips were going to touch the child's cheek, she would close her eyes, and seemed to wait to see if I would not repeat it, a natural enough idea, but one which only came to me later, when the ice was completely broken between us. This was how it happened.

As a matter of course, I had my garden and piece of ground where I cultivated vegetables —not the rarest, my strained relations with the gardener not permitting me to ask favors of him, or to obtain anything better than stunted cabbage-plants or superfluous beans. This is what comes—I have experienced it still more bitterly since then—from being in the opposition.

One day I was trimming my lettuce-plants, which seemed to take a spiteful pleasure in growing as tall as possible, while my peas were obstinate in only rising a few inches from the ground in spite of the inviting trellis I had prepared for them. Miss Rosie passed along the side of my domain escorted by her nurse. She stopped to watch me work, and regarded

my horticultural products with an admiration which flattered me more than I cared to show, for, with very rare exceptions, the people who passed by chance openly refused to look upon my efforts as serious.

In spite of the entreaties of 'Lisbeth, who wanted her to go farther, she resisted, and stood watching. When I remember it to-day I think—with more vanity than then—that she was thinking more of the gardener than the garden. To have a companion for her solitary games, even one older than herself—was it not the instinctive dream of this child, of whom it could be said, "She came to her own, and they received her very badly"? I must have seemed like a great personage in a comic opera, reassuring a shepherdess when I made her a sign that I would permit her to enter my inclosure—inclosure formed of a hedge of box six inches high. She accepted, blushing with pleasure, and I proudly led her from the forest of my raspberry-bushes to the prairie where my spinach was just leaving the ground, then to my farm, represented by a green box, where, behind some bars, white rabbits were moving their noses, and, lastly, to

my country-house, a rustic bench, sheltered by a roof of reeds. My white rabbits, as one may suppose, were the part of all my riches which attracted my visitor the most. She stroked them with her little hand, after asking my permission with a humble look. If I had allowed her to go on, I think we might have been there still. . . . Poor dear! Now I would give fields, château, and farms, if I could bring back those days!

But then I considered that I had something better to do than to content the curiosity of a little girl, and I declared to her, by signs, that I must go back to my work. By signs the child made me understand that I would make her the happiest person in the world if I would let her work too. She had no idea that she had placed the yoke of slavery on her own neck. From that moment I had under my orders a docile and remarkably intelligent laborer of indefatigable zeal, who asked nothing from her master, not even gratitude. As a matter of course, I gave her the most disagreeable part of the work to do, such as taking the small stones and weeds from the beds and destroying the snails, who seemed to have

come from all the country round to take refuge in my spinach. During all these hours of work, my subordinate never once revolted against my rather tyrannical authority. As she worked she tried to talk with me, and I flatter myself that I was her first, if not her best professor in our language. Once more I proved in this connection the truth of the saying, that a good deed is never lost. My enemy the gardener, witness of my friendly intentions with my little cousin, and possibly mistaking my motives, became suddenly devoted to me. From that time he gave me some of his best plants and rarest seeds. More remarkable still, when later I made marauding expeditions among his forcing-houses, I had the satisfaction of seeing my former enemy turn his back, as if he were resolved to let me have full liberty,

This gardener was a strange being, with all kinds of learning. What was my astonishment one day, to hear him speaking English with 'Lisbeth! Nearly every day as she worked at her knitting, or watched over "Miss Rosie," as the servants called her, the gardener chanced to pass by. Certainly, 'Lisbeth did not seem a very attractive person. However, he fell in

love with her, without saying a word to any one, even to the person most interested. He ended by marrying her when they were both pretty well advanced in years.

Outside of serious occupations—that is to say, in my garden, during the repasts, and the few minutes when we were together in the *salon*—I began to treat my cousin rather more graciously, though I still maintained with her the airs of a superior to an inferior being. On the very rare occasions when she ventured to pronounce some words of French, I laughed at her mistakes with the haughty commiseration of a chancellor of the Academy, when in my quality of teacher I should have excused them.

Poor child! If ever a being was preserved by early education from vanity, it was she. If she did anything wrong very much was made of it and she was severely reproved, while her good qualities and actions were accepted as a matter of course. As soon as she understood a few words of French, my grandmother told her so often how ugly she was, that I came to regard her as a sort of monster disinherited by Nature. English, poor, ugly, and a Protestant! What an accumulation of misfortunes on a sin-

gle human being! I needed all the precepts of Christian charity that I learned each day in the "De Viris" to give me the courage to be kind to her—except when we were among the snails.

But it seemed that she was born with that most useful gift, of being content with little. If I only looked at her from one end of the table to the other with something resembling a smile, if I allowed her to put her head near enough to mine as we sat in my favorite corner of the *salon* to admire the wonderful pictures of my book, I was repaid by one of the long, loving looks which she reserved exclusively for two beings in the world—my Uncle John and me. I spoke of human beings, for my white rabbits, which I allowed her to take care of—of course under my orders—shared the love of their little protectress.

One day, when a numerous family of little ones had appeared, to her great astonishment—and even to mine, for we were very ignorant—this poor little child, who had no mother to caress her, nearly fainted with joy.

VII.

It was inevitable that so much sweetness and gentleness should produce their natural effect in natures which were really good, as were the members of the family—even the "ancestors." Little by little every one began to love the child who made no noise, occupied so small a place, and demanded so little. It was easy to perceive that all the Vandelnays in the world, even the youngest, loved Rosie when no one saw them, and appeared to ignore her existence as soon as a human form appeared at the end of the corridor. Hardly a day passed when my little cousin did not appear at table with a bit of ribbon or some jet which friendly hands had added to her very plain morning-dress. One evening when she was in the *salon* while her nurse was at dinner, she most imprudently came to offer me *bonbons* from a bag bearing

the name of the fashionable shop in Poitiers, which seemed to make my father very uneasy, as he was the only member of the family who had been in town that day. But it seemed as if every one had agreed to see nothing, and I hurried the offending object back into the pocket from which it ought not to have been taken.

Some days after Rosie appeared pressing to her breast a perfectly new and exceedingly small doll. The following week the doll was six inches longer, and before the end of the month it was almost as big as Rosie herself, and its clothes were certainly much finer.

The dolls were treated as the *bonbons* had been; no one seemed to know where they came from. My cousin might, I am sure, have gone about the château with the Colossus of Rhodes in her arms without any question being asked. She continued to be nearly as silent as at first; only when we were in the garden she began to chatter as well as she could in French, in spite of my ridicule.

Evidently there were things against her of which I was ignorant. One I deeply deplored, which, so far as I could make out, was one of the least. Every evening at the hour of prayer,

and every Sunday when we went to mass, and the place of the young heretic was empty, there was a frown on every brow. Could this wound never be closed? This thought, in spite of my youth, made me very anxious. Toward the end of the spring which followed the arrival of my cousin at Vandelnay, the minds of the family were preoccupied by a single subject—my confirmation and first communion, which were approaching. I had come to the time for meditation and penitence. My garden was abandoned, and I hardly ever saw my cousin. Did they fear that my religious faith would be tampered with? What would have happened if, like a new Polyeucte, I had declared before the holy altar:

"I am a Protestant!"

The thing did not seem to me probable, for I felt ready to die for my faith. But who can tell what wiles the enemy of mankind may try?

I must confess that the excellent curé who directed my conscience and gave me instruction, seemed to have the most liberal ideas on all these subjects. More than once we touched on the fatal subject, for the nearer I came to

heaven the greater was my distress to think that my poor cousin was in such danger.

"Do not be uneasy," the good priest said. "God is good, and will show his goodness to us. Pray for your cousin, and leave the rest to Heaven."

Partly reassured by these words, I prayed earnestly to God that he would open the eyes of the poor child; also, that she might be allowed to be present at the ceremony.

Thus it was a great joy to me to learn that on that day Rosie would go to mass.

Before going to the little chapel, which was decorated as it had not been since my father's wedding, all the family assembled in the *salon*. Then I entered, and struggling against a real emotion, such as I have never felt in my life since then, I asked their pardon for the faults of which I might have been guilty, as I asked God also to forgive me.

As a matter of course, they did not show themselves less pitiful than the Creator.

My grandfather blessed me solemnly; everybody wept. My cousin looked at me with her big black eyes full of astonishment, mixed with a strange expression which I could not define.

For the first time since her arrival at Vandelnay—probably for the first time in her life—she witnessed the pomp of our worship. No one can convince me that the sermon was not preached expressly for her:

"Suffer little children to come unto me."

When the mass was ended, the communicants walked in procession, the bells ringing, and the organ playing.

As a matter of course, all the village had its eyes fixed on "M. Gaston," and I regret to add, that I have never since that day been so worthy of general esteem and attention. I looked for my little cousin in the crowd of my relatives of every degree of nearness. At last I discovered her in a remote corner, looking at me with a sort of mystic respect. Her generally calm face expressed the greatest enthusiasm. I signed to her, she approached gently, and as if she considered herself unworthy of a more intimate caress, took my hand, and pressed it against her heart.

In the evening, at the hour of family worship, most unexpectedly Rosie did something which all her relatives were pleased to attribute to my powerful intercession. Once more

she took my hand, and silently we followed the pious assembly. From that day she always prayed with us. I will anticipate events to say that four years after she was baptized and received the communion. I had the honor of being her godfather, her conversion being attributed in a great measure to me. If later in life I influenced the feminine mind in a less profitable fashion, I hope I shall be pardoned in consideration of this my first conversion.

For several months after my first communion things went on in their usual way at Vandelnay, but with a sensible amelioration in the lot of my cousin. She was treated with kindness, but always with a certain reserve, as if, in spite of everything, some cloud hung over her. Then the time came when I must leave home to go to college, and for weeks before the thought of this event seemed to cover the château with a pall, for all its inhabitants, masters or servants, had, I believe, the weakness to be fond of me.

I told the great news to my cousin. One day, in the beginning of September, when we were working in my garden, the sudden thought of how useless it all was came over me.

"My poor Rosie," I sighed, "when the chrysanthemums which we are planting are in flower, I shall not be here to see them."

At first she did not understand. As her habit was, she made me repeat my phrase, for she no more allowed one of my words to fall to the ground, than if they were golden. When I had carefully explained to her what college was, and how this fatal invention would separate us for months, the face of my companion seemed to assume the rigidity of marble, which, to speak the truth, was its usual appearance, when we were not together. She reflected deeply for a moment:

"That is the reason why they have been sad for several days!"

"Does it seem to you that they are sad?" I replied, flattered by the importance which she ascribed to me.

"Oh! certainly, Gastie," she replied, with emphasis. "Yesterday I saw my aunt crying. What a pity I can not go to college in your place. Then nobody would cry."

This reply seemed so absurd to me that I burst out laughing, which proves that a man does not always understand things as they

ought to be understood, and the manner in which they fail to read a woman's heart, even the heart of a little woman seven years old.

From this day my garden continued to receive our visits, but the instruments of culture were allowed to rust, for we passed our time in pitying *me*. I had made the discovery that the part of victim has great compensations. I generously allowed Rosie to weep over me, without thinking whether she did not sometimes feel like weeping over herself, so persuaded was I that we did not belong to the same category of human beings.

I will cut short the recital of those last days.

When the time had come to say good-by, I am ashamed to state that I gave proof of weakness unworthy of my sex; I was absolutely dissolved in tears! As for my cousin, I saw very little of her during the last hours; I could not perceive that she shed tears, perhaps considering herself too far removed from the family to allow herself this luxury.

But my mother's first letter contained this postscript:

"I forgot to tell you that your cousin took

to her bed the day after you left. The doctor can not discover that there is anything in particular the matter, but ascribes it to the fact that she is growing fast. My precious child, be sure to take good care of yourself."

VIII.

I TOOK the best care I could of myself, and my health supported triumphantly the trials through which I passed.

To speak frankly, I had not been twelve hours at college without discovering that the discipline was much less severe than at Vandelnay, and that there were far greater enjoyments there. But with a polite affection for the family, I took care not to speak of this agreeable surprise, and I had the tact to allow them to believe that the wounds in my heart would be long in healing.

"Try not to think too much about us," wrote my mother. "You will do yourself harm, my dear Gastie!"

Alas! she would have been quickly reassured if she could have seen her dear Gastie first at all the games, and filling the quadrangle with his joyous cries—triumphant in all the bat-

tles. Very soon her tender heart knew another fear. Thanks to the good curé at Vandelnay, I was, without any one's suspecting it, very well up in all the subjects which composed the limited programme of my class. The first compositions proved me to be destined to great successes.

"We are very proud of your triumphs," she wrote, "but do not work too hard."

It is the only one, I fear, of my mother's counsels that I have never neglected.

At the Easter vacation I arrived at Vandelnay in perfect health, and laden with prizes and testimonials. I understood by the way in which my grandfather embraced me that the time was past when I had neither the right to accept a second glass of wine nor to refuse the spinach. I felt that I was some one, especially as I considered that my uniform, in which I appeared for the first time, enhanced the dignity of my appearance. For a whole hour the assembled family examined, weighed, and measured me, as if I had been around the world.

The areopagus decided, contradictorily, that I resembled my ancestor the admiral, who was dark with features as sharp as a knife, my great-

great uncle who had a flat nose, and a relative still living, thank God! who passed, I have more than once been told, for one of the handsomest blondes of the court of Charles X.

In the midst of these agreeable discussions the dinner-hour arrived. As we were going into the dining-room, a small person whom I did not at first recognize—she had grown so much—approached me, more timidly I would wager than the relative just named approached the last legitimate king.

"Oh, Rosie!" I exclaimed, with the affability of a gracious prince. "You are still here."

By the glance that my uncle John threw me, I suspected that the remark was not a happy one, but in the general agitation no one but he seemed to have observed it. I tried to make up for it by kissing my cousin, who did not raise her eyes, and giving her my hand to lead her to the table.

The next day, in the course of conversation, I heard that she worked very hard—something like twelve hours a day—for all the feminine inhabitants of Vandelnay had clubbed together, so to speak, to push on her education.

My grandmother taught her sewing, my

Aunt Frederick grammar and spelling, my Aunt Alexandrine drawing and music, my mother writing, arithmetic, and sacred history. I shuddered simply to think of so much work.

She managed, I do not know how, to be at my garden when I passed there to take a look at my possessions. Even in the time of my greatest horticultural ardor my beds had never been in such splendid order. With anxious eyes, the child watched my face.

"Oh! oh!" I exclaimed, condescendingly, "you have replaced me very well, Rosie."

"Does it please you?" she stammered.

"Yes, certainly."

And without further praise, I went on to the little lake, where the swans who saw me coming approached the shore to take their food from my hand.

At the long vacation, in the month of August, I passed by these again, but Rosie was not waiting to beg for my approbation. The garden had run to seed, and was overgrown with weeds. She, too, had said to herself, What does it matter?

"The lazy little thing!" I thought, "I must scold her."

But a pony which I found in the stable—I had carried off all the prizes of my class—took from me both the time and the desire to scold any one, above all, so insignificant a person as Rosie. During the two months, full of pleasures of all kinds, which slipped away like a dream, I saw her very little.

Years passed. After the pony, came a gun, and I only thought of shooting and hunting.

Then Death came to the château, and when he had learned the way to the house, full of old people, he came back often as if the easy work pleased him! One after another the "ancestors" departed to sleep in the vault under our chapel. Then my Uncle John, the only one of his generation who was left, quitted Vandelnay with his granddaughter, heiress to a few thousand francs left her by Aunt Frederick. The other, Aunt Alexandrine, holding to the old custom, had made her will in my favor.

My parents were left masters of the place, and God knows with what pleasure they would have kept my Uncle John and his granddaughter under their roof. They begged him to retain his apartment in the old tower, but he would not hear of it.

"When my brother and sisters were alive," he said, "I could stay too. An old man more or less does not count. But time has gone on. I must give way to the younger generation. Besides, it will do Rosamond good to pass some time in Paris."

And he would not yield.

One fine day, he and Rosie went away from Vandelnay followed by 'Lisbeth. At this time I was studying law in Paris, and had no chance to say good-by to the youngest branch of my family.

When she wrote me about their departure, my mother sent me their address in a far-away quarter, somewhere behind the Luxembourg.

"You will often go to see them, I hope. I should like to be sure that they will be happy, but I doubt it, not only because they are poor, but because they will be so lonely in that great city without a friend. God knows that your father and I have done our best to prevent their departure, which makes us very sad. But you know your uncle. . . ."

When I read this letter, I resolved to go to see my uncle and cousin within three days, which would have been simple enough if I had

lived in their quarter. But I belonged to the category of students who were fashionable, and lived near the Madeleine in charming *entresols*, dining out every evening, and going to the University, when their social duties permitted, in perfectly appointed tilburies. I even believe that I went once or twice on horseback before taking my ride in the "Bois." I do not wish to pretend to be better than I am, but I affirm that when I woke up one morning, I said to myself:

"No matter if it blows or hails to-day, I will go to see my uncle and cousin."

Unfortunately, I could not find the address my mother had sent me. It seems simple to have asked for it, but I belonged to the class of beings ready to do anything for their families and friends but one—to write a letter.

It was certainly a great fault, and I frankly recognize it myself. But it must have been atoned for by other qualities, for every one about me was my friend.

When I reflect a little, I presume that the first of these qualities was my father's fortune, for he being kept at Vandelnay by ill-health, allowed me the benefit of all he possessed, with a generosity which with him was a system.

I had, besides, the gift of being amusing, which caused me to be sought after, though amusing people were less rare then than now, as all my contemporaries could testify.

I think I can also call the same testimony to bear witness that I was good-looking, a good dancer, a good horseman, neither too ignorant of the world nor too *blasé* for my age, disliking intensely all that was physically or morally ugly or unseemly.

As a characteristic trait, I may add that my manners were as severe as those of a monk, or stranger still, of a galley-slave. My horse, my friends, my studies—the latter rather neglected—my new duties as an accomplished man of the world, which I took seriously, kept me fully occupied, and left me no time to think of evil, and were enough to have tired the muscles of an athlete.

To sum up, with or without my will, I was irreproachable, and if I could only have found time to go to see my Uncle John and cousin, I did not see what I should have lacked of absolute perfection.

At the balls, I saw mothers who marked my head of twenty-three years with the seal of the

chosen, while in the secret of their hearts they thought:

"We must keep track of that young man; after a season or two, he will be an unexceptionable match, if he does not come to grief."

Ah! if young men knew why mothers go to balls, why at the risk of numberless fatigues they take their daughters there! If they knew why the daughters smile, talk, and go to supper! If they knew! But after all, to judge from their enthusiasm of to-day, I suspect that they *do* know. Are they ignorant of anything? And how tiresome and disappointing and sad it is —to know!

IX.

At the end of my first year of law studies, I passed a pretty good examination. It would be bad taste on my part to blame the simplicity of the studies or the indulgence of the examiners; certainly, since the first success in my intellectual career, I have never heard that a young man had failed to pass without pitying him profoundly.

I expected to return to Vandelnay for the vacation, but before going, I felt it as an imperative duty to go to see my Uncle John and his granddaughter. Fortunately, my fashionable friends of both sexes were dispersed in all directions; I had nothing to do just then but to show myself an affectionate relative.

But the difficulty, a real one, was to discover the address of the Baron de Vandelnay. Should I ask my mother for it I should have to confess

myself guilty of culpable negligence. Fortunately, the family notary, to whom I never failed to pay a visit on the first of each month, must possess the knowledge. And from him I learned that the old man lived in the Rue d'Assas. I took a cab, as well to spare him the sight of my equipage, as to save "Hannibal," whose feet were tender as a woman's, from the heated pavements of the left bank of the Seine, which were burning under the July sun.

When I learned from the *concierge* that the baron was at home, and alone—the fourth floor, and what a staircase—I felt as much emotion as I had experienced ten days ago before my examiners. As I went up I said to myself that it was easy enough to find well-sounding phrases in which to speak of the condition of freedmen or of the rights of minors. But what could I reply if the formidable question was put:

"Why did you not come to see us sooner?"

It seemed that Uncle John had not suffered much from the privation of my visits, for he received me as if we had parted the night before, with the gentle kindness and the smile of resignation which I had seen on his face ever

since the night when he came back to Vandelnay, bringing Rosie wrapped in her shawls.

Poor uncle! he had advanced another stage in the journey of life. It was easy to see that the next halt would be the last. His white hair was very long; his figure was bent; his clothes, although scrupulously neat, betrayed poverty. I even recognized with sorrow that they were the same he had worn at Vandelnay.

I hastened to speak of my cousin.

"She is at her painting," said my uncle. "Ah, it is true you do not know! She has been taken with a passion for painting. It is fair to say that she has some talent. But you can see for yourself."

On the walls hung four or five pictures, whose merits I should have had difficulty in making out—first, because I knew nothing about painting, and secondly, because my eyes were suddenly blurred. These pictures were views of Vandelnay, the park and the surroundings, probably from memory. On a small easel on the table, in a velvet frame, was a picture which brought emotion to the climax. It was a view of my garden as it had been eleven years before.

Uncle John turned his back upon me quickly, and began to look out of the window at the sky.

"You are going back there," he said, after a moment's silence; "I know that you have passed your examination, and I congratulate you."

"You know?" I stammered. "How did you learn it?"

"Your cousin told me, I believe. The child is a walking gazette, and tells me all that happens in Paris; the good things, of course. I rarely go out. My legs—"

He finished what he wanted to express by a grimace common to him when he wanted to escape a judgment in words on persons or things.

"Does my cousin go out much?" I asked.

If I had expressed my whole thought, I would have added:

"She would do better to paint less, and not to leave her old grandfather alone."

My uncle replied, not seeming in the least displeased with her:

"Thank God, 'Lisbeth is still with us, and she is an irreproachable chaperon. Poor Rosie, she will be sorry to have missed her cousin!"

"She can console herself, for I shall come back."

"Before the vacation? When do you leave?"

"To-morrow morning."

My uncle smiled a smile in which there was a whole chapter of philosophy.

The conversation was difficult. On my side, I reflected that it is difficult to find anything to say to people whom one sees once a year, while in a daily intimacy an hour seems short. My uncle reflected also. Suddenly he turned to me with one of those tender looks which I had never seen before Rosa's infancy.

"Listen," he said; "you may tell them that I love them with my whole heart; and words like these, you must know, are not often on my lips. That is my message to the living, who are only two, your father and mother. As for the dead, who are much more numerous, you must tell them"—his look had changed—"that I forgive them. Thus there will be no embarrassment when I go among them."

His handsome face was lighted with an expression of mocking defiance to Death, who would—soon, probably—unite him with the "ancestors." He added:

"The interview will be cold enough, at best!"

These words brought to mind my questions which I had not dared to ask him ten or twelve years before, and which later, among all my occupations, had passed from my mind. I asked the old man—speaking instinctively as I did when a child: "Uncle John, I know no more about your life than if you were a stranger. Do you not think I ought to know a little something?"

"You have suddenly become very curious!"

In speaking thus the baron tried to appear ironical. But I saw at once that my question, for some reason, pleased him.

"After all," he added, "it is your right. Each one of our lives, good or bad, useful or otherwise, belongs to our family, and from henceforth the care of the good old name will be in your hands. I hope, my dear boy, that it may bring you more happiness than it has to me and mine."

His face, which had been sad for a moment, became very serious. To my intense astonishment, the old man bowed low before me, with a kind of respect.

"Future Marquis of Vandelnay," said he, "this is the confession of one of your family who was severely judged by his own generation. You will perhaps be more indulgent."

"Was my uncle laughing at me?" I asked myself—and I am not sure yet. What I was sure of, was that I was disgusted with my curiosity, foreseeing more than one embarrassing comparison in the confession he announced. I give it, a little condensed, though the baron was not a man to expatiate uselessly on his own history.

X.

At the time of the revolution, the château of Vandelnay, was inhabited by the same persons I found there fifty years later. As a matter of course, I refer to the "ancestors." Balthazar de Vandelnay, the last marquis of the old "*régime*," died just in time for my grandfather to profit—one of the last of the French *noblesse* to do so—by that crumbling institution, "the right eldest son." He inherited the château, lands, and the whole fortune, and although he was only just twenty-five years old, assumed the responsibility of the head of the family, and was as grave, as implicitly obeyed by his brother and two sisters, as if he had also inherited the dignity of old age.

The necessity of taking care of his two young sisters, my aunts Frederick and Alexandrine, and, perhaps also, a wise foresight, hin-

dered him from emigrating, and the tempest passed harmlessly by these three aristocrats, which had cost the heads of so many who were older. But to provide that the family should not be obliterated in case of misfortune to himself, he confided my Uncle John to the care of one of his friends who was going to England. It was fated that this young emigrant of twelve years old should only return to his native land thirty-five years later, that is to say, near the end of the reign of Charles X. I omit all the first part of his story, not that it was less interesting, but that it was less directly connected with my own.

After studying in England, he went to India with an officer's commission; but Jean de Vandelnay's temper was as uncertain as his courage was brilliant, and a quarrel with his superior officers led him to throw up a position which would have led to fortune. Having become free, he started for France.

But his wanderings led him to Italy, through which he traveled leisurely, little counting on the fate that was in store for him.

A sudden passion for painting—which was the revelation of a new world—seized him, and

he haunted the galleries and the best studios. In one of these latter, which was a rendezvous for strangers of distinction passing through Florence, was a masterpiece, before which the works of the best painters paled; for this masterpiece was living.

Laura Scarpi, the rose of Tuscany, as all Florence called her, conquered the heart of my uncle by her first glance. She was the daughter of a painter richer in glory than in money. As for her mother — of her my Uncle John did not tell me a single word.

God knows why mystery remains forever hidden under this silence. As a matter of course, the most perfect frankness was due— from the Baron de Vandelnay, become the accepted suitor of Mademoiselle Scarpi—to the head of his family. One thing is certain. The traveler was informed that the doors of the paternal mansion would be open for him alone. This was not the way to change the resolution of a man of his temper. As he said himself:

"I could more easily have gone back to Vandelnay without my head, than without my wife, to whom I had plighted my faith."

The marriage took place, a marriage, as my

uncle said, "followed by twenty years of exile, poverty, and happiness." He told me nothing of this period of his life, and I remember that his cold reserve was both a disappointment and a wonder to my youthful curiosity. I did not understand then that there are some blessings that one enjoys, so to speak, on one's knees silently, so long as they last, and which one shuts up more mysteriously still in one's heart when they are lost.

These twenty peaceful years of blue sky ended suddenly in a night of storm. Death took from my uncle her who was the great part of his life; but on the closed tomb flourished a dazzling rose. Laura Scarpi left a daughter eighteen years old — she who was Rosie's mother.

Poor Uncle John! when he was forced to speak of his lost happiness, the words seemed to come with an effort from his nearly closed lips, and when he came to the remembrances of his days of trial, it was worse still, so that I had to guess the things which he did not say.

He allowed me thus to divine the other catastrophe of his life. A young Englishman, the younger son of a noble family, came to

Florence, and was struck by the daughter, as the Baron de Vandelnay had been by the mother. The baron had never been amiable, but his misfortunes had still further soured his temper. Disliking certain attentions which he chose to consider compromising, devoured by jealousy such as is sometimes seen in fathers, believing, to speak plainly, in an attempted seduction, the brilliant Frenchman made a scene. Mr. George Melvil could not, or would not give explanations; besides, this was the time when the hatred between the two nations was the most violent. A meeting took place, of which my uncle always carried the mark. At length I learned why he had fought and how he had been wounded.

"We must be just," added my uncle; "I lost patience too soon with that fool of a George; and when I recovered from a long fainting-fit, and found myself in bed, I do not know which was in the deepest sorrow, he or my poor daughter."

It was written that the Vandelnays of that generation should all die over eighty, so my Uncle John's wound healed, and as his sufferings had made him more patient, he listened

to explanations that completely satisfied him. Love had made George Melvil unreasonable, but he had never failed in respect for her who was the object of it. She, on her part, hardly suspected the evil her eyes had wrought.

Seeing his daughter so calm, Uncle John took courage, and thought the extent of the damage was the wound in his head. He did not count on the perfidious surprises of love.

My cousin, in her turn, fell violently in love with the young man who had nearly made her an orphan, and, as soon as the wounded man could dispense with his doctors, he heard another side of the story. To give his daughter to an Englishman, a Protestant, a younger son, without fortune! Death, rather! for, in spite of the poor opinion which his relatives had of him, he had remained in heart and mind as much of a Vandelnay as a Vandelnay can be. George received the most decided refusal.

As for my cousin, she threw herself at her father's feet, but he was inexorable.

"You must choose between this stranger and me," he said to his daughter. "If you

decide for him, I swear that you shall never see my face again in this world."

My beautiful relative had in her veins a mixture of Florentine blood with that of the Vandelnays. She decided for the stranger. Perhaps she hoped that her father's tenderness would prevent his keeping his oath. Poor, unfortunate child! She knew very little of her father's real nature! Never, alas! was an inhuman oath more strictly kept.

The young couple went to England, and my Uncle John, left alone in the world, came to knock at the doors of Vandelnay, which there was now no reason for closing upon the prodigal of fifty. Though the old man was most discreet in what he said, I perceived that neither his brother nor his sisters took even the smallest fatted calf from the pastures of Vandelnay with which to rejoice over his return. They agreed to let the past sleep, and that was all. Besides, my old remembrances were still vivid. I remembered my Uncle John, silent, reserved, almost isolated in the midst of his family. It was evident that the austere pride of the Vandelnays had never pardoned his two crimes—his own marriage and the union of

his daughter with an English heretic, though certainly the last ought not to have been imputed to him.

But he had other troubles. First, he learned that George Melvil had not been received much better in England than he had been in France.

He was reproached with having married a stranger without fortune, a Catholic, the daughter of a mother of low birth. Besides, his marriage put an end to the project of an advantageous union which his father, Lord Melvil, had for a long time cherished.

The young people lived in retirement, as poor and as happy as Uncle John had been in his little house in Florence. Then Death was again at work; but, at least, he did not separate those who loved each other. George and his wife, young as they were, were carried to the tomb with an interval of only a few weeks between their deaths, leaving Rosie to the care of her maternal grandfather. What was left for the old man to do but to pardon his daughter, and to bring his grandchild back to Vandelnay?

"And I did so," said my Uncle John when he had finished his story. "You were there,

you saw it all. Truly, as well as figuratively, you opened the doors of Vandelnay to your cousin."

"Which have never been closed!" I exclaimed, with a movement of sincere affection. "Uncle John, why will you not come home with Rosie and pass the vacation at Vandelnay? My parents would be so happy! And my cousin, too, I am sure."

A light shone in my uncle's eyes, so that I expected to hear him accept at once. Then suddenly—for the old man's fine loyal countenance was as transparent as a child's—an expression of embarrassment, almost of fear, succeeded the joy. Uncle John cast down his eyes. It seemed as if I had intimidated him. I thought I saw what the matter was, and, as I was still vibrating with the enthusiasm caused by the romantic story I had just heard, I called all my diplomacy to my aid, saying, in a gay tone:

"Uncle, I see where the shoe pinches. I will wager that you have committed some of the follies of youth, and that you have forestalled your allowance. Why should we not reverse the order of things. Uncles always find some *louis* to lend to frivolous nephews—"

"You are a fine fellow!" interrupted my uncle, extending his hand to me. "I give you my word that I would accept what you offer, if I needed it, if it were only to give a lesson to the nephews of the future, to show them how uncles pay what they borrow. But it is not the question of money that stops me. One or two business matters, which can not be put off, will keep me here perhaps a week or two longer."

"That does not matter; when your affairs are ended, you can start. When I get to Vandelnay, I shall make my report to my parents, and, in spite of yourself, you will be forced to pay us a visit. Otherwise, we will come, all three, to get you."

"Very well," said my uncle, "we shall see; I do not say no. In the mean time, give them all my love."

The hour was come to take leave, which was easy enough, as he did not try to keep me. My uncle evidently did not care that I should meet my cousin. He accompanied me to the stairs, through a forest of green plants, flowers, and birds.

"To judge from what I see, your granddaughter has kept her love for the country."

Uncle John lifted his eyebrows with a comical gesture of despair.

"This is nothing," he grumbled; "Rosie has goldfish in her bedroom, and in a corner of the garret, 'Lisbeth, in her spare moments, is bringing up a family of white rabbits. They must like it!"

"Perhaps they are rabbits from Vandelnay?" I asked, remembering Rosie's admiration for my former pets.

"It is possible," said my uncle, with an air of inattention.

We said good-by, promising to meet soon; phrases which are short and mean little.

On the evening of the second day after, I arrived at Vandelnay, worn out by the fatigue of the tiresome journey, for I would not leave "Hannibal," whose nerves were tired by the railroad travel, and whom I wished to exhibit in good condition to the Poitran in general and to my father in particular.

XI.

THE château was full of people.

"We did not wish you to find it stupid at home," said my father, as he went with me to my room, where I made a hasty toilet before dinner.

He enumerated our guests, speaking with so much enthusiasm and pleasure, that I suspected —between ourselves—that my excellent father in doing so much to amuse me, had thought a little of himself.

An hour after, my suspicions were far from being lessened, and certainly I did not condemn a need of amusement in a man whose first and second youth had been those of an anchorite, as I had been able to judge with my own eyes.

Ah! how Vandelnay had changed since the

"ancestors" had gone to take their places under the armoried slabs of the chapel!

Of all the living beings I had known there, only four remained; my father, my mother, myself, and the gardener. The latter had become a personage, dressing like a gentleman, and commanding an army of workmen, who cultivated the flowers and vegetables and did the rough work. The old inclosures had ceased to exist. It was changed into a vast undulating park, broken by little lakes, and plantations of flowering shrubs which concealed the kitchen-garden, as a lowborn father-in-law conceals himself in the *salon* of his daughter become a duchess. Splendid green-houses and model stables had risen from the ground.

Correct and perfectly trained servants went silently about the corridors. If family prayers had been mentioned to them, I will wager that we should have figured in a scathing article in the "Siécle."

As for the guests, they were the cream of the country; cream frothed each year by a short sojourn in Paris. Tiresome, old-fashioned people, châtelaines with stuff dresses and bunches of keys, were not of this company; nei-

ther were there marriageable young girls, for, according to my father's ideas, I was not a victim to be hurried to the altar.

But if young girls were lacking, young married women certainly were not. When I reached the *salon*, I had the pleasure of counting three who were remarkably beautiful, and before we had arrived at the dessert, one by whose side I was placed did me the honor to make me understand that she accepted my attentions seriously. In the course of the evening, which was enlivened by a little waltzing, the other two gave me positive evidence of equally amiable dispositions.

To be taken seriously! What flattery for a young man of twenty-three could equal this, especially accustomed as I was to the distrust of the fashionable world of Paris, where a man is worthless without respectable years!

Ah! what a charming evening, passed with my mother smiling on me, happy to see me again, and those other smiles—less maternal! For the first time life, youth, and hope spoke clearly to me of all sorts of pleasant things that their confused voices had only whispered in my ears before.—"Happy mortal! thou

hast long years before thee. Thou art rich, thou hast the gift of pleasing. Finally, why be modest, thou art handsome. Thou wast born under a lucky star; thy father is proud of thee, thy mother smiles at thee; nothing is impossible for thee." I believe, that without going beyond Vandelnay, I could have made serious progress in the good graces of one or two of the charming persons who were there. But, without seeming to interfere, my mother was on the watch, and if sometimes that great amusement called flirting seemed to be taking serious proportions, her eyes, as beautiful as they were good, recalled the transgressor to reason before there had been grave offense.

"And my Uncle John? And my cousin Rosie?" you will say. "And the promised invitation?"

I can swear by the Styx that I had not forgotten them. The day after my arrival at Vandelnay, after a visit to Hannibal's box, where fortunately all went well, I went alone into the park, and asked myself seriously what was best to be done. I knew certainly that I had only to give a sign, and my parents would dispatch,

if necessary, three embassadors to the Rue d'Assas, to bring them in triumph to Poitiers.

But was it prudent to give the sign? In the case of my uncle there was nothing embarrassing. To speak frankly, he was rather morose, if not misanthropic. But such defects were excusable at his age; besides, he made up for them by his past century wit, which was always brilliant and satirical—but in his younger days full of charm. Finally, there was not a château in France or Navarre where such a guest would not be in his proper place.

Unfortunately, I was less sure about Rosie. I had not seen her for a long time, but I remembered that she was tall for her age, thin, with something inharmonious in her movements. My impression was, that she was not beautiful; though, to say the truth, I had never remarked whether she was or not. But during several years of my life I had heard severe voices say to my poor cousin, if by chance she had glanced into a mirror in passing:

"What pleasure can a child who is so ugly have in looking at herself?"

I do not know whether these repeated affirmations convinced the subject of them of her

ugliness. As for me, there was no doubt left in my mind; ugly she came into the world, ugly she would live and die. Besides, I was accustomed to the luxury of the fashionable world and its elegance. I had entered it with the avidity of a fish which, put in water, at once uses his fins to reach the bottom. According to my ideas, a woman could not be beautiful if she was poorly dressed, and for too good reasons Rosie's clothes could not resemble those of my well-dressed acquaintances.

Finally, the remembrance I had of her was that of a reserved and silent person, very timid or very proud—probably both. What appearance could the poor child make among the women, young or well preserved, who filled Vandelnay with their laughter and the rustle of their silks.

Would it not be cruel to expose her to the mortification of a society so little suited to her? The answer to this question did not seem doubtful to me, especially as I could not see how it would be possible for me to pay her much attention, my time was so fully occupied.

The two sides being well considered, it seemed to me prudent to leave my Uncle John

and his granddaughter in their fourth story of the Rue d'Assas until the time should come when we should have resumed our quiet life at Vandelnay. Thus we should enjoy their presence more, and the pleasure would be greater for them; it would be better for everybody.

Unfortunately, when the first series of guests had gone, we were not long without a second—the hunters. My father said to everybody:

"I want my son to enjoy himself at Vandelnay, so that he will have no desire to leave us in order to enjoy himself elsewhere."

But I saw, more and more plainly, that my father, secretly preoccupied by the progress of a slow malady which was to be fatal, put to my account the need for amusement which he himself experienced. As for my mother, she had no desires apart from his. For one reason or another, the long vacation of the law-school passed for me like a dream.

Some visits to be made in the neighborhood to friends and relatives, all gay people, took what little time I had left. Briefly, when the sun rose on the fourteenth of November, Uncle John and his granddaughter were still

in their own home, or if they were not, I had nothing to do with it.

I had to leave my parents in the evening after dinner, to catch the express. In the afternoon, my father sent for me to come to his library, and spoke to me as follows:

"My dear boy, you are going back. To tell the truth, I do not feel an overwhelming desire to see you pass a first examination in the code, but I expect you to become an accomplished man of the world, and I think you are fairly started. You will do me the justice to acknowledge that I do not interfere with you—I, who have never known what it was to be young and free."

He stopped for some moments and uttered a sigh, in which I heard the sad regrets for a youth that was gone. I wanted to console my father. I remembered him, fifteen years younger, occupying the same place at the end of the table, presided over by the "ancestors." But what could I say? Presently he resumed: "Never forget that you are named Vandelnay. There are some hundreds of names in France which are more illustrious, a few which are older, none with fewer stains. In two or three

years, if God wills, you may be one of the best matches in society. Do not waste all the rare advantages you possess. Try not to do foolish things; at least do nothing dishonorable. And to avoid so doing, go into society, and only the best, though I hear that that is terribly deteriorated. You will come to see us this winter, will you not?"

I went off without "Hannibal," one of my friends having given me a good price for him for the hunting season. With what pleasure I went back to my pretty little apartment, to my dear boulevard!

When I went to inscribe myself at the law-school on the day of my arrival, I remembered that it was not far from the Rue d'Assas. It would have been a good chance to pay a visit to Rosie. But I met friends who took me off with them, and I went back to my own quarter without having accomplished this duty.

XII.

WITH one or two exceptions, the houses of my acquaintances were still closed; but during the first days I had no time to be lonely. I left some cards, had several serious conversations with my tailor, and paid some bills. Then I had to find some horses, two for the phaeton and a good saddle horse, then to see the carriage-maker, and to choose a larger stable, and to assure myself of an English specialist—what must the ghosts of the "ancestors" have thought—to whom to confide my stable.

These different affairs ended, I was on the point of having nothing to do, when accident put an amusement, a charming distraction in my path.

Madame X—— did not belong to the fashionable world, to tell the truth; but there are

lower circles which have some good qualities. She was a widow, and confessed to thirty years. Rich, very beautiful, concealing under a most correct exterior a real love of intrigue, she seemed, as soon as we met, to value my attentions. Putting false modesty aside, I may say that my progress in her good graces was singularly rapid. I had not been in her house six times when she asked me if I liked pictures? With the candor of an inexperienced young man, I confessed that I knew nothing about them.

"It is a pity," she said, with a smile which suddenly created a wild love of art in me. "I should have asked you to have the goodness to take me one of these days to the Louvre."

At present—I do not wish to offend the susceptibilities of certain novel-writers—the Louvre is horribly out of fashion, at least for this special purpose. But at that epoch it was not so. Our artistic expedition took place the next day, and we had not taken fifty steps in the *salon carré* before I had lost all fear of exposing my shameful ignorance about pictures. I had not even the chance of finding out whether my com-

panion was more learned than myself, for she made no effort to bring the conversation, which had taken a completely different direction, back to painting. It was the first time that I had made love, in all the extent and signification, future and present, of the term, and I have observed on this and like occasions, that the words of the song are less important than the music.

Briefly, everything was going perfectly well, considering that it was my first attempt; we were passing slowly through the nearly deserted rooms, walking closely enough together to speak almost in whispers, when I was brought back to earth, from the heights in which I was soaring, by the sudden exclamation in a foreign tongue which struck my ear:

"Oh Master Gastie!"

I trembled as if King Charles IX had suddenly confronted me with his problematical arquebus, and recognized—'Lisbeth! I honestly believe she was occupied with the identical knitting which absorbed her at Vandelnay while she overlooked the horticultural efforts of my cousin and myself. Instinctively I looked for Rosie, and saw her seated before an easel, on

which she was sketching a copy of a Madonna.

Of course no one could think that the meeting was very agreeable to any of us, except, perhaps, to 'Lisbeth, who was radiant. Rosie appeared the most annoyed. Doubtless she was not much pleased at being surprised in her working-dress by her cousin, and by an unknown person who was elegance itself.

As for me, I wished myself a hundred miles away, and my companion was not much more at her ease. We looked at each other without speaking, and the situation was becoming absurd, when, with remarkable tact, my cousin extended her hand, as if my presence there was the most natural thing in the world.

"So you have come back," she said, in a voice which was wonderfully sweet, though it trembled almost imperceptibly. "Are my uncle and my aunt well?"

I answered in the same strain, and expatiated on the beauties of Rosie's painting, without leaving the side of Madame X——.

"When can I find you at home?" I asked, so as to put an end to a conversation which,

in spite of our efforts, was not very agreeable.

"Every day after five o'clock."

"I will go to see you very soon. Is my uncle well?"

"Very well, thank you. Good-by!"

"Good-by!"

I gently led my companion far from the place where the meeting had taken place. With a singular air, she asked:

"So you did not know that your cousin came to the Louvre to copy 'Murillos'?"

"To begin with, she is my cousin, if you like," I replied, with diplomacy. "We are related in the twentieth degree. She has no fortune and does not go into society. So you need have no fear—"

"But you seem intimate?"

I told Rosie's history briefly, and how we had lived under the same roof until I went to college.

"And you have never been in love with her?" my companion asked.

"In love with Rosie!"

The idea seemed so absurd that I laughed aloud.

"Poor child," I said, when I was serious again; "I can not imagine any one's falling in love with her."

Madame X—— looked at me as if to see if I was in earnest. Then, doubtless satisfied with her examination, she brought the conversation back to subjects which interested us both. Five minutes later, a cab was carrying my goddess back to her dwelling. Then, being free, I returned to the room where Rosie was painting. At length I should be able to unburden myself to some one about my new conquest.

The young artist had gone back to her Virgin, and 'Lisbeth had resumed her knitting. I approached with an air of importance such as D'Artagan must have had when he brought back the queen's diamonds from England, and speaking so as to be heard only by my cousin:

"My good Rosie, I am sure I can trust you, that you will not speak of what you have seen."

She turned red and pale in a moment, keeping her black eyes, honest and frank, like her grandfather's, fixed on me.

"Have no fear," she replied, simply. Then, with rather a sad smile, she added:

"Besides, to whom should I speak? I see no one."

"Do you often come here?"

"Every day."

"To paint copies?"

"Between us, I am afraid that my originals would not shine in the Louvre."

"But," I exclaimed, foolishly enough, "you must have a whole museum of copies in the Rue d'Assas! When I go to see you, you can show me the collection."

She began to paint again with the seriousness with which, from a child, she had always worked.

"My copies are dispersed," she replied, with more of melancholy than embarrassment; "I sell them to churches which are not rich enough to buy real Murillos."

"Poor Rosie!" I thought, and I had accused her of abandoning my Uncle John for the pleasure of daubing on canvas. It was certainly not for amusement that she painted!

I felt all at once a sincere esteem and affection for the courageous girl. And then she

was my confidante, the confidante of my first secret.

With the tendency we all experience to come back to the subject which is uppermost in our thoughts, I said to her, very proud of the falsehood to which my honor as a gentleman forced me:

"You understand, cousin, that you would be quite wrong to suppose that a—there is anything between that lady and me. But a woman's reputation is such a delicate thing! At your age you can not understand certain things."

"Oh!" she replied, looking at me once more; "according to years I am only twenty; but the life I lead makes me at least thirty. I feel myself much older than you, Gastie!"

I experienced an unknown pleasure in listening to her rich voice, and as I listened, I remarked that we had employed the "*vous*" instead of the "*tu*" of our infancy.

"Why," I asked, "is it that we do not '*tutoyer*' each other as at Vandelnay?"

My question no doubt annoyed her, for she lifted her brush from the canvas.

I thought I understood that I kept her from working, and that she wished me to go.

"You have yourself given the reason," she said. "We are no longer at Vandelnay."

I felt a rush of emotion of which I was proud. Why should we not appreciate our own noble sentiments as well as those of others?

"What matter?" I replied. "Are we not as good friends as we used to be? Listen, Rosie; would you not like to have a sure and devoted friend, who would tell you everything, and who would even consult you? for to me, also, it seems that you are older than I am. I will come and see you often. You do not know how glad I am to see you again. I assure you that I am not a bad fellow, and that I am very fond of you."

"I am sure of it," she said, as if she was not paying much attention, as she began to put up her brushes. "So we are good friends again. When you come to see us, do not come before five o'clock if you want to see me. I am only afraid that I shall not be an amusing friend. I know no one, and none of the news,"

"How can you say that?" I said, laughingly. "You know everything. You told my Uncle John the result of my last examination."

"Shall I tell him that we have met?" she asked, without noticing my remark.

I was forced to agree that it would be better not to speak of my visit to the Louvre. We said good-by, promising to meet soon again.

XIII.

I WAS the happiest of men, and the proudest. I tasted the joys of my first serious conquest. I only lived for Madame X——. I tried to meet her in society—a society a little less aristocratic than that which I had been in the habit of frequenting.

When odious duties kept me from her I had but one consolation, but one desire—to speak of her. It was not that temptations did not come every day to put my constancy to the test. One might have thought that I wore the beloved name on my hat, as sailors have the names of their ships, in gilt letters. I venture to say that I might easily have enlisted under other colors. Coquetries, languishing looks, insinuations more or less clear, notes, anonymous or signed—all the arrows of the feminine quiver fell on me as on a living target. I

swore to the queen of my heart to adore her until my ast breath, and I was perfectly determined to keep my oath.

Therefore glances, little attentions, even letters, left me as cold as marble, which seemed to increase the audacity of the aggressors.

At first I did not speak, even to my intimate friends, of the passion which consumed me. But as I came to mention the charms of Madame X—— (I would have died before naming her) these young men replied by praising some one else, and, dreadful to relate, they sometimes named her! In such circumstances, the conversation was like one of Vergil's Eclogues, where two shepherds in turn celebrate the charms of their loved one.

But in my cousin I found an auditor who, if not enthusiastic, was at least willing to hear me, and had no personal motive for interrupting me. So I went to see her very often, and almost always at the museum. In the Rue d'Assas, we always found a pretext at some time during my visit of leaving my uncle with his books, so as to talk freely.

Certainly, I took care to remember that I was speaking to a young girl. But Rosie had

told me herself that for reason and good sense she might have been thirty.

"My poor dear," I said to her, with an air of wisdom, "in all that concerns love you are a child. You have no idea what it means."

Then I made her long confidences on the subject in which I considered myself past-master, and, like the professors of mineralogy, who takes stones from their pockets to prove their theories, I showed as specimens notes received in the morning.

Sometimes, to tell the whole truth, the pupil threw, innocently enough, some drops of cold water over the ardent convictions of her master. This simple nature had a mania for making objections. I always had an answer ready, and managed to have the last word; but sometimes as I went down-stairs I felt less proud of myself, less satisfied with others, less sure of a happy future.

This inexperienced child had depths of logic and a delicate penetration which surprised me. What I found the most difficult to pardon her was her small appreciation of the happiness I gave to or received from another. It seemed as if this gold was only a base metal in her eyes.

"You really understand nothing about it," I said one day when I had lost patience; "you are made for the humdrum life of every day."

"And you for its rose-marmalade," my cousin replied. "But the humdrum life is the most lasting; you will find it out sooner or later."

From that day on, in our great discussions I called her "Miss Cinderella," to which she replied by asking news of Madame "Rose-marmalade." I was more vexed than I appeared, and I said:

"But after all, you have seen her, you can not deny her beauty!"

"Oh!" replied my cousin, with a grimace, "it is easy to be beautiful if one has nothing else to do! Give me her dressmaker and milliner. I can do the rest, for I know how to paint!"

The first time I was furious at this insinuation. But some hours later, when I was with Madame X——, I could not help looking at her more critically than I had done before. I was angry with Rosie for her insinuations. What business was it of this child's?

Near the end of the winter I discovered something much more serious, which nearly killed me. Madame X—— proved to be a despicable coquette, to give her no worse name, and she was deceiving me, as much as she could, with a rich financier, who knew how to use his money.

During two whole days I was ashamed to go and tell Rosie my trouble. On the third, I was so unhappy that I could hold out no longer, and I went to spread out my griefs before her.

"Poor friend," she said, "I pity you with my whole heart."

Words of compassion came from her lips, but her eyes shone with a light which told another story. Doubtless, she experienced the satisfaction so dear to all women of saying:

"I foresaw it all!"

In any case, she did not say it, and she acted wisely, for I think I could have beaten her had she done so.

"Ah! Rosie," I exclaimed, "what will become of me? I can never be consoled. What a false wretch!"

"Others will console you," she said. "If I

can read aright, there are in the world compassionate souls quite ready to repair the wrongs of Madame Rose-mar—"

My features must have assumed a terrible aspect at this joke, for my cousin stopped short.

At the end of a week, my sorrow was not assuaged. I tried to go into society. Alas! the sight of a woman cut me to the heart. Some exasperated me by their mocking air, thinly veiled by smiles. Others made me indignant by a certain appearance of well-disguised pleasure. Did they by chance imagine I could replace by another the faith I had lost?

"Ah! Rosie," I exclaimed one day, "it is hard at my age to despise all women."

"All?" she said, looking at me with big severe eyes.

"Yes, all," I replied, stamping my foot, "except a saint, who is my mother."

"And me?" she asked, with a look which was quite different from the long affectionate glance of other days.

The question seemed so absurd from her that I found strength of mind for a joke.

"Oh! you, Miss Cinderella, you are not a woman, and I congratulate you sincerely."

Fortune took pity on my state. The following day, I learned that one of my intimate friends had just bought a yacht, and was going off the following week to cruise in the Grecian Archipelago. I hurried to his house to see if he would give me a cabin.

"Except my own," he said, "you may have them all; I shall be entirely alone."

"How extraordinary! This long voyage alone! What an idea!"

"My friend, I tell you plainly that I shall be a lugubrious companion. I am leaving France to try to forget a great sorrow, a cruel ingratitude."

I took his hand and pressed it silently.

"And I," I said in my turn, "I am going, so that the perfidious woman who has wounded me may not have the pleasure of watching my agony."

With such a beginning, we poured out our hearts to each other. Fortunately, we had no ideas beyond a yacht-voyage.

If our youthful despair had taken the less healthy direction of a revolver or poison, I am

sure that we could have so intoxicated ourselves by our words as to have committed an irreparable stupidity.

Before separating, we discussed many things, the most important being as to how we should leave. My friend was in favor of disappearing silently, with dignity, something like "a despair which loses itself in immensity"—I still remember his words.

I was for a very different course.

"Why should we fly like theives, when it is we who have been plundered, betrayed, misunderstood?"

I shall astonish no one in stating that my opinion carried the day. We began our leave-takings, going about with heart-broken airs, like men who after a duel appear with their arms in slings.

Three days after, all my friends and acquaintances knew that I was going to one of the desolate shores of the archipelago, to die of a broken heart. I had pronounced no name, feeling that in such a case the least indiscretion would be unworthy of a gentleman. However, I perceived that no one was in doubt about my history. The favor of Madame X—— and

her perfidy toward me were perfectly well known.

Oh, sublime cowardice of a loving heart! I adored the faithless one more than ever; I would have forgotten all at a sign from her. In a fit of great humility, I told my cousin so, when I said good-by to her, the night before I set sail.

"She knows that I am going," I said. "It is impossible that she does not know it. Will she let me depart like this? Shall I not find when I get home a letter with the word 'stay.' Will she not write to me to stop my voyage, 'to come back to my chain'?"

My cousin did not answer, and the look of annoyance on her face recalled to me that, in spite of the thirty years which she claimed, I ought to be more circumspect in my words.

"And you, Rosie," I said, so as to break off from the dangerous subject, "I suppose you will write to me?"

"I fear," she said, "that my letters would be horribly tiresome."

"Oh no," I protested, politely. "You can tell me about yourself, about your painting, and about my Uncle John. On the contrary, your

letters would please me very much. I know that you are my devoted friend, and when the heart is wounded—"

I stopped overcome by emotion. My cousin replied, with a sigh of resignation:

"I will write to you since you desire it. Your address?"

"Poste rastente, Constantinople."

We rejoined my Uncle John, and I shook hands with him cordially in taking leave. I kissed my cousin on both cheeks, and went home to finish my packing. I had written to my parents that I was going to be absent for two months, and excused myself from going to take leave of them by the suddenness of my departure.

"I approve what you are doing," my father wrote. "It is a good thing to travel at your age. Observe carefully, so as to remember what you see, to tell us about it when you return. I envy you. How much you will amuse yourself!"

My poor father, he did not know that I went off with despair in my heart! He spoke of my return. Does the traveler led by despair know when his journey will end, or how?

The moment of my departure came, and the

unfaithful one had made no sign. My friend and I had the appearance of two culprits condemned to death, when the Galathea bore us from the shores of Provence, where our eyes in vain tried to discern two shadows.

XIV.

LET compassionate souls reassure themselves.

The heavy burden of despair which weighed down my heart seemed to diminish as did the coal in our hold. The air of the Mediteranean must possess some singularly consoling properties, for before we had touched at Naples I could already foresee the possibility of living—with my wounded heart.

"I shall suffer till my last day," I thought, as I watched the deep blue furrow left by the untiring screw behind us. "But I feel that I shall have the courage to live. Only let no one ever speak to me again of love! Let the irony of this terrible word never strike my ears. Only one woman shall ever say that she has conquered, subjugated, betrayed Gaston de Vandelnay."

When we put to sea after a visit to Pompeii,

this beautiful corpse from which profane hands have taken so much of its winding-sheet of ashes, it seemed to me that the remembrance of Madame X——, and that of the beauties whose apartments and jewels I had just seen, dated from about the same century.

As we sailed by the coasts of Cythera—we would have been ashamed to lose an hour in going ashore there—I smiled with pride as if I were looking at the devastated city of an enemy from henceforth powerless. Ah! we should never boast!

At the Parthenon, under whose yellow-tinted columns the goddess still seemed to glide, clothed in the long folds of her white tunic, mysterious voices mingling with the sacrificial incense, murmured in my ears:

"Live without love, and you shall live happy!"

And already I experienced a vague satisfaction in living, in breathing the perfume of the jasmines floating through the dusty streets—in following with charmed looks the young black-eyed Athenians, as they filled their amphoræ at the fountain.

To sum up—shall I confess?—while I climbed

the slopes of Galata to go to get my letters at the French post-office of Constantinople, one thought absorbed me:

"If only *she* has not written to me to come back!"

In that case I should have been the most unhappy man in the world—forced to say good-by so soon to this captivating East, of which I had seen so little. Oh! the holy city with its minarets and cupolas bathed in verdure! Oh! the Bosporus, with its double row of silent palaces!

The women, draped in their pale-colored silks and satins, permitting their big black eyes to be seen through the convenient muslin of the yachmak! Those eyes which shone so brilliantly under the fringe of hair golden with henna!

Only three letters were waiting for me at the post, two on which I counted, from my mother and Rosa; the third, with an unknown handwriting, the letters having the square look of a professional writer. The big envelope was in yellow paper, which gave it a business-like appearance. But one must not trust to appearances. This is what I read in the mysterious missive which I had opened first:

"SIR:

"We have met several times in a *salon* which is emblazoned with one of the oldest names of France, but I will no more name the masters of the house than I will allow you to divine my own.

"You will ask how much I have known you, if we have often talked or danced together, what we have said to each other, if I pleased you, if you paid any court to me? Perhaps, also, you are curious—a curiosity which is flattering for me—to know my impressions about yourself. Here is a long list of questions; but I will only answer the last.

"Does it interest you less than the others? Confess that it does not.

"Very well, I think things of you—that I have been careful not to tell you, or even to allow you to suspect.

"But reassure yourself, it was neither from modesty nor from fear of your disdain.

"I know your tastes. I have sometimes thought you less particular than you had a right to be as to women. I have perceived in you an amount of indulgence which would encourage a more modest person than I am.

"But what should I have gained in having the gates of the temple opened for me? I should have found myself in too large a company. I only appreciate chapels which are closely shut, with a single shrine, where a pure flame burns, and is never extinguished.

"Your enthusiasms, as nearly as I understand them, resemble decorations illuminated by Bengal fires, which pass quickly to make room for the next thing on the programme.

"With all this—which will surprise you—I have suffered much, and I suffer still, for I love you.

"Do not laugh too much, do not say, 'Oh! still another!'

"Yes, I love you, and doubtless I am not the first who has written it to you. But what distinguishes me from the others is, that I shall always love you, and that you will never know who I am. You shrug your shoulders? You say that I play a well-known air? You will see that it is not so. In ten years you will know no more than you do to-day. And in ten years I shall love you still.

"Besides, if I were like the others, I should not have waited for you to be seven or eight

hundred miles from France to tell you that you are always in my thoughts, that I would give my life, if it belonged to me, to beautify yours, that your eyes, when they meet mine, give me the greatest happiness that I have ever known —notwithstanding, the tenderness of the best and noblest of human beings surrounds me with a constant adoration. But I love you, and I have been so unhappy at having never told you so, that I try to tell it now, to see if I shall be happier.

"This is all, and our correspondence ought to stop here. Only, I should like to know if you have received this letter, which contains, I have the vanity to believe, something infinitely precious — a heart that has never belonged to another. You will tell me sincerely what you think of my folly. But all the good or the bad which you can say will not prevent these being the last lines written to you by

"A DEVOTED FRIEND."

The signature of this singular missive was a pansy delicately sketched with the pen. A postscript invited me to reply under complicat-

ed initials to the post-office of the quarter of the Madelaine, Paris.

No matter what may be thought of me, I will confess that I reread the letter twice, before opening the other two, which certainly were far from containing anything as interesting. My mother gave me details of the daily life at Vandelnay, ending her fourth page with pressing recommendations to take care of myself, and to "be prudent in a country where a man's life counts for so little." Certainly in writing these lines, my dear mother had visions of poignards, and of leathern sacks in which two victims of different sex are thrown struggling into the Bosporus!

As for my cousin's letter, it was written as she talked. The same simple, reasonable affection, far removed from all exaltation of thought or language. Poor Miss Cinderella! In spite of all, her prose might have seemed charming to me but for the unknown rival, in contrast with whom this simple soul seemed singularly commonplace. But who could this other woman be, at once romantic and modest, whose love fell on me as the perfumed flowers fall on a passer through a grove of orange-trees? Could

I have seen her without remarking her? Where had I met her? By what involuntary charm had I captivated her?

For an hour, I turned over in my mind four or five of the most aristocratic *salons* that I had frequented in the time when Madame X—— had not enticed me into a lower sphere. I had vague remembrances of certain faces.

I called my imagination to my aid to paint the unknown's portrait. I thought of her as tall and blonde, a dreamy, poetic creature. Why had she given this idea of profound love to me, who felt myself unworthy of so precious an offering to me, who had allowed my head to be turned by the graces and admiration of a coquette? Nevertheless, my unknown correspondent seemed to have few illusions about me.

The proof was in certain phrases of her letter, and in the distrust of me which she did not hesitate to manifest.

Oh, sudden and inexplicable variations of the human heart! The evening before, my young reputation of a man of the world appeared to me as a crown of glory, picturesquely veiled by the funereal crape of a treason. And

now I had only one desire—to convince this gentle friend that I was a faithful and discreet chevalier worthy of being loved, worthy of being admitted to see her, of kneeling before her, of kissing her hands, or at least the folds of her dress. My enthusiasm was such that I could have started at once to seek for the tender creature in every street and house of Paris, to watch for her a month, if necessary, at the post-office to which she was to go for my answer.

On reflection, I saw that I must take other means of reaching her if I wished one day to solve the mystery. Without waiting to go back to the wharf to reach the Galathea, I went to a hotel in Pera, and asked for a room and writing-materials. I remember that my letter began in this wise:

"MADAME: What you ironically term 'my temple,' is now only a heap of ruins, on which rises the 'well closed' chapel in which you wish that I should worship you. The poor lamp of my heart is kindled before the altar. Only one thing is lacking to this new worship—the image, the name of her who has converted me from my gross errors.

"I shall wait for this name; my respect begs kneeling for this image concealed behind its veil of purity. Apostle of a true and pure love, you have with a single word overthrown my idol. This is only the half of your good work, and I have the right to say to you: Will you give nothing to replace what you have destroyed?"

My new zeal exhausted itself in many closely written pages, in a manner which I am afraid would make most men of twenty-five—my age then—smile.

I confessed and repented of my past errors, particularly regarding Madame X——, not naming her, of course, except by well-veiled allusions. For the future, I engaged myself by the most formidable oaths to be the model of lovers. But I let it be understood that all my fine resolutions depended on the new ruler of my life; that if I had an immediate answer I guarantied my perseverance; that if my beautiful correspondent executed her threats of perpetual silence, God knows what would become of me! Should I ever return? Should I not pursue my wanderings, hardened sinner as I would become,

from Turkey to India, from India to China, from China to Japan, and farther if possible? My parents would die of grief!

Whose would be the fault?

An answer, an answer containing even a gleam of hope, and I would return to France at once, corrected of all my errors, with a new heart in my breast. She could do as she liked. I was really almost out of my mind.

When my letter had gone, I counted the hours before I could have an answer. Do I say hours? It was really two weeks at that time, for the Eastern express from Paris to Varna was unknown.

During these two weeks my friend and I visited the various bazaars and mosques from Stamboul to Scutari. Besides, we got up steam on the Galathea more than once and went to the Islands of Princes, or to the upper Bosporus, or to the coasts of the Black Sea, where, I may say—in parentheses—that I and my new chapel—still statueless—were nearly drowned. But we had no gallant adventures, there was not the slightest temptation, which for young converts of my temperament is the surest guaranty for perseverance. I can not tell what would

have happened if I had been on probation in a country where the women were less guarded.

At length the French mail-steamer was signaled by the Galathea, whose flags I had learned by heart.

O joy! at the post they gave me an envelope with the same handwriting as the letter which I had reread so often. My divinity was not inexorable, and I should be spared the journey to Japan.

"Sir," she wrote, "I love your parents too much—without knowing them—to deprive them for so long a time of the presence of their son. You asked for an answer; here it is. As for the rest, you will allow me to say that I can not take all that you say for pure gold. I distrust such easy and sudden conversions, and I believe one must suffer a little, have at least some wounds by fire or steel, some confrontation with the beasts of the amphitheatre.

"But you must resign yourself. Your chapel—I congratulate you on having built it so easily—will one day, if it please God, hold a statue which will be faithfully honored. But it will not be mine, which can not leave the mod-

est niche where duty has placed it. I repeat that I love you, that I shall love you always. It gives me a sweet satisfaction to have told you, that you are no longer ignorant of it, though you are ignorant of all the rest. Since I was a child, I do not remember to have experienced a like happiness.

"Perhaps, as you are coming back, I shall see you in the distance from time to time, but my secret will be better kept than before, as it ought to be; I should die of shame if it were otherwise. But I shall tenderly watch your progress in life. If you remain worthy of me, I will tell you with my pen from time to time that I know it, that I am proud of you, and grateful, until the day when another, who will be your wife, will tell you such things with her lips. I blush for my own weakness, for I had sworn to myself to write you only once. But this weakness harms no one. It will not keep me from fulfilling any of the duties of my life—and you, my friend, until now, you have hardly had duties."

A pansy, as before, replaced a signature. I pressed it to my lips.

"Who knows," I whispered to myself, "other lips have perhaps pressed this flower?"

There were but two letters for me in the post; the one I have cited, and a second from my mother.

Nothing from my cousin this time; but I had no right to complain, for poor Miss Cinderella was still waiting for one from me—the answer to hers. What could I say to that quiet, prosaic person, so far removed from my present frame of mind that I should have been forced to rack my brains to send her twenty lines! Could I tell her of my platonic and epistolary success? Why do so? Could written words initiate that simple being into the mysteries of a great passion?

I understood a great passion; I breathed it; I moved in an atmosphere at once pure and intoxicating, as that of high mountains.

Sometimes, astonished at the new sentiment which absorbed me, I was afraid that I was the prey of a passing fancy developed under the Eastern sun. Or perhaps I experienced, in spite of myself, the influence of a passionate tenderness which came to me from afar. Perhaps my heart was wandering in pursuit of a phantom,

which I should soon find to be no more than an incoherent dream. If ever accident or the constancy of my efforts revealed my unknown friend to me, should I not perceive my error and my incapability of loving her?

"You will love her wildly if you ever discover her," my heart replied. "If she escapes you, the crown of happiness will always be wanting to your life."

From that time every hour passed in that distant land seemed to me lost. I hastened to find my friend. "Listen," I said; "I must go back to Paris. Will you be angry with me if I desert you?"

"I was going to propose to you to leave," said the lord and master of the Galathea. "I bore myself horribly in this city, where the women are phantoms. The Parisians are like the lance of Achilles. If one is wounded by them—it is by them one must be healed. To-morrow at sunrise we will look back on this city, disappearing in floods of gold. But what has happened to you? You are radiant. I will wager that *she* has written to you to come back."

I told my story discreetly. Besides, under

the circumstances, it would have been difficult to be indiscreet.

"You seem to me in the position of a man who is going to be very much deceived," grumbled this frightful skeptic.

I hurried away so as not to do him a bodily harm. At dawn, when I heard the grating of the chain as they got up the anchor, I had hardly closed my eyes. Five days after my companion and I took our places in the express which leaves Marseilles at six o'clock in the evening. Only a few hours and I should breathe the same air as my lady of the pansies!

XV.

THE first thing I did in Paris was to go to the post-office in the quarter of the Madelaine, where I paid a considerable sum in postage. I had not lost my time during our five days' voyage, and the heavy package which fell in the letter-box, resembled a love-letter much less than a manuscript deposited by a young author furtively in the letter-box of a possible publisher.

There was everything in the package. Remembrances of childhood and youth, detestation of my past errors, protestations for the future, poems in honor of my new love, which from henceforth was to fill my life—all this mixed in the pages, which ended by an appeal to her mercy.

"You could," I said, "always have left me ignorant of my happiness. Have you now the right to cause the misery of my whole life?

What evil have I done you, that you should so torture me? What do you fear from me? Is not the name which I bear a guaranty that my sentiments are those of a gentleman? Do you not see that I venerate you as a saint, that I would content myself with seeing you from time to time, at a distance, if, as you say, an unhappy destiny separates us? Or, do you think I shall love you less after I have seen you? Ah! it is your soul, your heart that I love! What does the rest matter!—But what folly! I would wager ten of the best years of my life that the rest is charming!"

I went directly from the Madelaine to the Louvre.

Certainly, the tranquil Rosie was not the confidante I would have chosen for my romance. But I could not choose, and, besides, in default of other qualifications of a confidante, my cousin had that of perfect resignation. She would have charmed Corneille or Racine for this part. I found her, as I had done several months before, copying the same Virgin, with 'Lisbeth busy with the same knitting. When she saw me, she uttered a little cry of surprise.

"You! you have come back already? What

has happened? I did not expect you for a year, at least."

"It has happened," I replied, "that your cousin is at once the happiest and the most unfortunate of men. See, read these letters."

"Gently!" said my cousin, drawing back her hands as if from a hot iron. "Your confidence honors me, but you forget to whom you speak, and I have had to acknowledge to myself that I have listened rather too much to your confessions."

"You can read," I insisted; "you will not repent having read these charming pages. I even counsel you to learn them by heart. You would be the gainer."

With a slight smile, she quietly laid down her pallete and brushes. Little by little the color rose in her cheeks, and when she had reached the end of the second letter, with her brilliant eyes, and her cheeks like deep-red roses, she was—I can not deny it—absolutely pretty. But at that moment I was very slightly interested in Rosie's beauty.

She slightly shrugged her shoulders—perfectly shaped shoulders! As she took up her work again, she replied:

"You will be angry, but never mind! Well, you are both crazy—she, to write such trash to a man whom she scarcely knows. Poor thing! why can I not at once discover her name and address! I would make it my duty to hurry to her and say: 'Beware!' Women ought to warn each other. As for you, I think you are more ridiculous than before, and I would bet this Murillo against my copy, that it is all the work of an ugly, sentimental old woman. And it is for such a reason that you have cut short your fine journey to the East!"

"Rosie!" I almost shouted; "you were born commonplace, and commonplace you will die. I leave you, and I will only see you again when I shall have discovered my unknown correspondent! Then you can judge if she is old and ugly!"

"Very good!" she said, with her frank, good-natured laugh; "our separation will be rather long! You may be sure that she is too wise to make herself known. But let us sign a treaty of peace; I will only say what pleases you. But my poor friend, what do you expect to do?"

"Look for her all over Paris, house by house. And, above all, let time convince her—if I sacrifice ten years of my life for it—that I am worthy of her, and that she may reveal herself to me!"

"You would not be much better off if you found a married woman, mother of four children!"

"She might become a widow, and her children should be mine. In any case, I could see her sometimes. Without this woman, I do not wish to live. I adore her passionately!"

I spoke in such an excited manner that 'Lisbeth, who could not help hearing, plunged her head into her knitting. As for my cousin, she broke into a fit of laughter. I had never supposed her capable of such noisy gayety.

"My faith—" I said, parodying the misanthrope without intending it—"I do not see why I am so ridiculous!"

"I beg your pardon, my good Gastie; but I seem to see you as you were in this same place last autumn, doing the honors of the Louvre to a certain elegant creature. Do you remember Madame Rose-marmalade?"

She wiped her eyes, to which her laughter had brought becoming tears.

"By the way," she resumed, "do you know what I have just thought of? What if that superb person is making a fool of you by disguising her hand-writing! What if your former passion and this is the same!"

At first sight the idea was not so absurd, and I felt the color mounting to my forehead. But a few moments' consideration reassured me.

"Listen," I replied, motioning toward the Murillo with my head; "if to-morrow the director of the Louvre were told, 'The picture which hangs there is by Mademoiselle Rosie,' do you think he would believe it?"

"No!" sighed my cousin.

"Very well, the letters I have in my pocket resemble what that coquette would think or write as much as Murillo's picture resembles yours. You must admit that I am a competent judge?"

Rosie bent over her canvas, doubtless a little mortified at my frankness with respect to her talent.

As I left her I said:

"I shall go to see my Uncle John very soon, but only when my lady of the pansies shall have answered my letter. I shall be glad to show you hers. But perhaps my confidences weary you?"

"No!" said my cousin, with her pleasant smile, "I have been used to them for a long time. They really interest me."

We said good-by with no ill-feeling after a cordial shake of the hands. As I went down the wide steps I said to myself:

"Really, Rosie is getting to be a pretty girl —but what a prosaic one!"

XVI.

"I KNEW of your return from the East through my granddaughter, and I suppose you have come to announce your departure for Vandelnay. Your parents must be expecting you."

My uncle received me with these words, when I went to present my respects to him some days later, having in my pocket a letter which I had received that morning.

Leave for Vandelnay! Put a great distance between myself and the charming woman whose tender, generous words consoled my heart! how should I have the courage? But the month of June was coming to an end. In another fortnight the lectures at the law-school would be over. As for the examination, I was as much prepared for it in medicine as in law.

For months I had had no time to think of the code. But what pretext could I imagine for not leaving the capital?

"My projects," I replied, evasively, "are vague at present."

This time I dared not speak to my uncle of his own visit to us.

As soon as I was alone with Rosie, I began on the subject which I had most at heart.

"I am very unhappy!" I exclaimed. "Read this charming letter. You will not find a word, not a comma, which does not show that the woman who wrote it was made for me. She hardly knows me, but her heart knows mine by a penetration which is almost supernatural. What she says is exactly what she ought to say. She loves me with a love which ennobles me in my own eyes, and will beautify my whole life. I think she could make a good and earnest man of me. She has already made me better. Is it possible that I am never destined to know her name?"

My cousin read slowly, giving herself trouble, as if she were making out passages written in a foreign language, which it was necessary to translate line by line. But cold as she was, I could read in her face that the letter pleased her.

"Yes," she said, as she gave me back the

paper. "I begin to believe that this woman speaks sincerely, that she has a real love for you. But you are more experienced than I am in such matters—who can say if either of you would be better off if the cloud which conceals you from each other were blown away? I saw a picture of Psyche the other day. It seemed to me that her story resembled yours. The love would end when the mystery did!"

"And it seems to me," I said, threateningly, "that Miss Cinderella is making sport of her cousin."

"I assure you that I am not," she replied, most seriously.

"Then I do not understand, for you change your mind. You go from one extreme to another. I should like to see you worshiped all your life by a man of whom you could say nothing—neither if he were handsome or ugly, blind, thin, old—and even in a man, these things are less important. Ah! I know what will happen if my cruel friend obstinately continues to conceal herself!"

"I also; I know very well. You will abandon such an obstinate person to her unhappy fate, and you will marry a good woman who

will remind you of the little you know of her, but of whose age, face, and the rest you can judge for yourself. It seems to me that this conclusion is not so bad."

"Bad or not, it is impossible. I shall die an old bachelor, leaving to your second son the fortune and name of Vandelnay."

"You are crazy," said my cousin, shrugging her shoulders.

And our conversation ended for that day.

At that season of the year, Paris, from a fashionable point of view, did not exist; my days and evenings dragged on heavily. My only resource was the conversation of my cousin; I amused myself in converting her gently to my sentimental theories. I saw her every day, either at the Louvre or the Rue d'Assas. One day she said, laughingly, to me:

"Are you never afraid that you will do me harm in giving me wings? When they have quite grown, shall I be better off behind the bars of my cage? Now, at least, I have no idea or desire of flying away to the country of dreams."

"I am not uneasy about you," I replied. "Your wings, if they are really growing, will

never be of much use to you. Do you remember the winged creatures we used to visit together at Vandelnay?"

"Very well; the ducks of the poultry-yard. Thanks for the comparison!"

"What a trying person! Who is speaking of ducks? I meant the swans. Neither you nor I have ever seen them fly."

"Because they were happy where they were."

As she spoke, Rosie bent her head over her work with such a graceful motion of the neck that my comparison was truer than it seemed at first.

On the tenth of July, I received a letter from my lady of the pansies. If I have remembered this date, it is because it marked the end of a correspondence which had given me great happiness during three months. I was not destined again to see the big, disguised handwriting, and the flowery signature at the end of her sweet confessions. On this day, instead of a single pansy, the mysterious hand had sketched a bouquet of them, sketched with exquisite art, even though it was easy to see that they were thrown on the paper without trouble.

In these four pages, as closely written as if she did not wish to leave a space unfilled, there was always the same maternal tenderness, with a deeper note, in which I guessed something of hesitation. The letter ended with these lines:

"And now, my dear, we are going away. The green fields tempt us; this heated Paris has not fresh air enough for us. Let us say good-by to it, for some months. In any case, you can be at ease. If your letters are sent to the usual address, I shall receive them, and you shall have mine, which will pass by Paris, for you will not know where I am. But what does that matter to you, when there is one thing of which you are sure! Do you not feel that I love you? Here is a proof—at present, it is I who need your letters, it is I who ask you to write. Do not forget me at Vandelnay, where there are many distractions, I am told. At least, if you do forget me, let it be for a young girl worthy of you, and who will be your wife. Choose carefully when the time comes. To know that you were unhappy, or that you had made another person so, would be the great sorrow of my life."

As long as she was going to leave Paris, I had no reason for staying, so I prepared for my departure.

But the prospect of a bustling life like that of the year before was insupportable to me. I wrote to my mother that I was tired, and that I earnestly desired to enjoy the most complete repose during the first days of my stay in the country. I also spoke to my parents of my desire to bring my uncle and cousin with me. I explained this wish, not without some hypocrisy, by my desire to give the young girl and the old man the pleasure of a stay in the country that would benefit them. But to tell the truth, I should not know what to do without my confidante. Alone at Vandelnay, with no one to whom I could speak of my lady of the pansies! It was frightful to contemplate.

My mother replied by the next post, sending a pressing invitation for my Uncle John and Rosie. What did I say? An invitation! she rather begged them to make a long visit to the old home, always theirs, which had been so long without them. The one objection, the difficulty which my Uncle John found in traveling, need not be thought of, as I would be with them.

I knew very well what to do to make the inflexible baron consent. I went to see him at an hour when I supposed his granddaughter would be at the Louvre.

"Uncle John," I said, "you see before you an embassador, and here are his credentials."

I gave him my mother's invitation. The letter was read with some scowls which I easily understood:

"Your mother is just as good as I have always known her," said my uncle. "But what she asks is very difficult."

"If it were ten times more difficult, it would still have to be done," I replied, gravely. "Rosie will be ill if she passes the summer in Paris."

I had touched his weak point. My uncle started as he would have done fifty years earlier at an insult.

"Rosie ill!" he exclaimed. "What do you know about it?"

"She is changed," I replied, coolly. "She is thin, and her eyes look large; she is getting bent over with too much work. Three days ago, during a little visit I made her at the Louvre, she coughed several times—a bad cough."

"She never complains."

"Of course not, if you wait for her to complain! She knows that you do not like change, and she is always ready to sacrifice herself!"

"Yes, very ready to sacrifice herself!" repeated my uncle, in an echo which resembled a roar.

He turned his back to me in a kind of bad humor, as if I were responsible for my cousin's unselfishness.

"When she comes in I will speak to her," he muttered between his teeth, "she shall see a doctor to-morrow."

"To-morrow, my dear uncle, if you do not absolutely refuse, we three will take the express to Poitiers."

"Not so fast, my nephew; if my granddaughter is ill, I must take her to some waters. I do not know a worse place than Vandelnay; my rheumatism can testify."

What a singular fancy, not to be willing to go with me! What was the reason of this resistance? Remembrance of the past? As I asked myself these questions, we heard Rosie's voice singing in the antechamber.

"Listen; does she seem ill?" said my Uncle John.

All my plans were upset. But I tried a second way of taking him by surprise when Rosie entered.

"Would you like that we should all start for Vandelnay together?" I asked, before my uncle had had time to say a word. "Your grandfather wants very much to go; but he is afraid of doing something you do not like."

The nightingale was suddenly silent. The lovely color in her cheeks faded, leaving them like lilies.

"Start for Vandelnay—all together! Oh! what happiness!" murmured my cousin, allowing herself to fall into a chair.

"Wretch!" cried my uncle. "She is going to faint."

"And I told you she was ill!" I replied, in a low voice.

Already the bright color was coming back. To judge from the symptoms, this illness was only the effect of a great joy. Rosie asked, in a voice which would have sent my uncle back to India:

"Grandfather, is it true that we are going?"

She looked at me as she questioned him.

"Go quickly and begin your packing," I decided, audaciously. "We must be at the station to-morrow morning exactly at eight o'clock."

We were there before half-past seven. I do not remember any day's journey that ever went so quickly as that. My good action was already receiving its reward!

XVII.

My dispatch had gone faster than our express. The château had put on an air of rejoicing to wait for us, but with the contented look of people who are happy for themselves, and not for their neighbors.

When he saw the tops of the towers of the manor above the encircling trees, my Uncle John bit his mustache, and we did not hear his voice again until the carriage stopped in the court. As for Rosie, she talked for two, uttering little exclamations of pleasure at each remembered turn in the road, calling each peasant who rose from his bench to salute us by name; full of admiration at the changes in the village.

My father and mother seemed so happy at the arrival of the travelers that it would have

been difficult to decide which of the three was received with the greatest tenderness. But during dinner the general attention was turned to me, and the conversation was almost entirely about my expedition to the East. My father approved it loudly; he said that the desire to see the world and to learn by experience was most praiseworthy in a young man. My uncle, who scarcely listened, assented. Undoubtedly, his mind went back to his former travels, and mine must have seemed insignificant in comparison. As for the only person who knew the real reason for my travels, she made bass-reliefs in bread-crumbs, carefully avoiding looking at me, to keep from laughing I suppose.

Uncle John and Rosie, tired with their journey, went early to their rooms in the little tower, accompanied by the *chatelaine*. When we were alone, my father said to me:

"Your cousin is superb. She has the eyes and eyebrows of an Italian, and the complexion of an English woman. How is it that you have never spoken of her?"

"Because my cousin hardly seems to me a woman. I always think of her as she was when her grandfather put her down on the

sofa fast asleep on a certain winter's evening. We are the best comrades in the world; but if she has the hair of an Italian, she has the matter-of-fact mind of an English woman."

"Really," said my father, "it is astonishing! She does not look like it. After all, it is happier for her, for it will not be easy to find a husband for her."

"I do not think she will ever marry," I said, with a serious air. "I expect she will give us a second edition of Aunt Alexandrine."

"As she likes," my father concluded; "only do not you give us a second Uncle John!"

"Poor father!" I sighed, inwardly. "You do not suspect that your son is in love with an inaccessible fairy, and that Gaston de Vandelnay will probably be the last of his race."

The next morning I wandered about the park in the early freshness. As I approached a huge plane-tree, under which rustic benches invited to repose, I perceived a white figure in a dreamy attitude.

"Well, Rosie, are you already regretting your museum and easel and Madonnas?"

She turned her head toward me, and I saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"No," she said, with her usual simplicity. "No, but I regret being older than I was when we worked together in our little garden."

"How absurd to have regrets! At that time you were an ugly little girl, and now—"

"And now?" she repeated, looking at me as if she had not the faintest idea of what I was going to say.

"And now you are a remarakbly beautiful person."

She looked so astonished and incredulous that I hastened to give my authority.

"Certainly; my father said so no longer ago than last night."

"Ah!" she replied, modestly; "it is my uncle. He is really very good."

I had to agree myself that she was beautiful. In her badly made muslin morning-dress, which would have shocked a fashionable beauty, the perfect grace of her figure could not be concealed. Her face, with its classic features, shone with the light of youth. Her hands and feet were admirable.

"It is singular," I thought, "how much better one sees certain details when one is quiet. I might have spent twenty years in the whirl-

pool of Paris in the vicinity of this charming person without perceiving her charms."

The first week of our stay at Vandelnay was delightful. The neighborhood had not yet learned that there were guests in the château, and I begged my mother to prolong their ignorance as much as possible. After so many years, it would not be easy for me to say what Rosie and I did. I only know that we were always together, and that evening came before the day had seemed long. Of course we talked three fourths of the time of the lady of the pansies. Dear creature! where could she be? in the mountains, at the sea-shore? or in some shady country-house with her husband and children—for after consultation, we had decided that she had children—made still more beautiful by the conflict between duty and her mysterious tenderness. In three days, in two days, to-morrow, I should have the expected letter!

"Oh, Rosie, how I wish it was to-morrow!"

At this wish, my cousin was silent, and for the first time I saw a shadow pass over her face, a shadow of annoyance, doubtless. But really, could I be angry with her, if the letter

so ardently expected interested her less than me?

The post-man brought me no letter—or at least, not hers. It was the same the next day, the day after, and the following days for a week.

Ah! all the calm of the first days was past! What did my parents, the park, my horses, matter to me? My compassionate cousin was the only one who could understand me, and, within a certain limit, console me. According to her, the delay which caused me such anxiety was the effect of some slight accident, and I had no reason to alarm myself.

There had been some mistake about a journey, some stay in a place off the traveled routes, some family duty—for up to that time my correspondent had faithfully kept her promises.

"And if she is ill or dead?"

Until then, I had felt sure that I should one day know her. "Must I renounce this joy forever? Pity me, Rosie, for I am most unhappy!"

I understood then, for the first time, all the compassionate pity which there is in the heart of a woman, even at an age when her heart

might have less melancholly thoughts. Patient as an Eastern slave accustomed to the caprices of her master—mine were not of a kind which even slightly resembled those of a pasha—my cousin left everything, if I but made her a sign, to talk with me—that is, to listen to my complaints. Sometimes she gently protested against my sadness. She often repeated:

"A human being has not the right to bemoan his destiny when he possesses the assurance of being faithfully and sincerely loved!"

These unplatonic arguments touched me very little, for I wished to be acknowledged the most unhappy of men, even though I admitted that I was the most tenderly consoled.

"My poor Rosie," I said, pressing her small hands in mine, "if I could forget as she does, it would be for you that I should wish to do it."

"I am sure that she thinks of you more than ever," replied my cousin. "I have a presentiment that in a few days everything will be explained."

It was impossible to make her give up this assurance, which I was far from sharing with her.

Whenever it was possible for me to put my

preoccupation aside, I immediately found in her the most charming, the gayest, the most amusing of companions. One day I could not refrain from saying to her, with secret envy:

"Do you know, Rosie, that you seem to me to be a perfectly happy woman?"

"It is more than seeming," she said, gravely. At the present moment, I am as happy as a woman can be. In three weeks grandfather has grown twenty years younger. My uncle and aunt treat me like a daughter. And you can not imagine what pleasure it gives me to see dear old Vandelnay."

"Very well; what hinders you and Uncle John from ending your lives here? You can be to me what Aunt Frederick was to our grandfather. And we will grow old together, as they did."

She closed her eyes, but the perspective seemed to please her very moderately, for she replied, nervously:

"I can not look forward to the future; let me profit by the present."

It was easy to see that she enjoyed like a sybarite each hour passed among us. Everything delighted her; but she still more de-

lighted everybody. Four persons disputed from morning till evening as to which should have the pleasure of seeing her and having her to listen to their complaints and confidences.

Uncle John's rheumatism, my father's gastric troubles, the administrative cares of my mother —always full of troubles with servants, with the poor, with asylums and good works—and, lastly, my heart-troubles—all came to her, and she was neither astonished nor overcome.

When in our family talks Uncle John spoke of their return to Paris, there was a silence, as at the announcement of some catastrophe.

When, by chance, Rosie had an hour to herself, her happiness was to seat herself under the plane-tree where our garden had been, where she read some favorite book or wrote her letters.

One day, toward the middle of an afternoon which was oppressively hot, I passed that way just as the first gusts of a coming storm were tearing the yellow leaves and small branches from the tree.

"Be quick, pick up your papers, pen, and ink," I said to my cousin. "Do you not hear the thunder? What are you thinking about?"

"Of nothing," she said, startled, for she had been so absorbed that she had not noticed my approach.

"Upon my word, Miss Cinderella is taking the airs of Mignon," I said, laughingly. "So you are getting to be a dreamer!"

Before she could reply, a violent gust of wind threw down the portfolio on which she had been writing. In a second, twenty sheets of paper were scattered about among the dry branches of the plane-tree.

We ran to the right and left in pursuit of the fugitives.

A sheet rather larger than the others seemed to defy my efforts. It flew in front of me, skimming over the short grass, stopping, and beginning its course again at the moment when I was ready to seize it, only to fall to the ground farther on, like a wounded bird.

It is my temperament to care most for the pursuit of difficult things, no matter what they are. I swore that this new kind of game should not escape me, and I managed to seize it, thanks to its mistake in getting entangled in the crooked branches of some low bushes.

"How foolish to take so much trouble," I

cried, seeing that my prize was only a sheet of ordinary blotting-paper.

No, not so ordinary. In looking at it, I saw something which made me stop short in spite of the thunder and lightning and which made my cousin—a hundred feet off—cry out with terror.

But I heard nothing, and saw only the leaf of pink paper, on which I read my fate.

Very soon the heavy rain forced me to hurry to the château, not before having carefully folded my prize and placed it in the depths of my pocket. There was no one under the plane-tree; Rosie had preceded me. I was glad of it. It suited me better to see her later, when my last doubts should have been dissipated, and when I should have listened to what an unknown voice whispered to my heart, overcome by surprise.

The preliminary inquest was not long—the time to go up to my room, to open my secretary, and to take out the last letter of my lady of the pansies, to spread out the leaf I had just picked up, to compare the bouquet traced on the thick English paper, with that which was printed on the spongy surface of the blotting-paper. Twins could not have been more alike.

"Idiot, blind fool, selfish! My dearly loved Rosie! My beautiful, my loving, my proud Rosie! Too proud, poor child! Distrustful, above all; but could I blame her for being distrustful? Alas! I had taken care to show myself to her under a light little calculated to give her faith."

I laughed and wept as I uttered these incoherent words. I went over, one after another, a hundred remembrances of the last days.

How much I had made her suffer since the eyes of the orphan had first seen me on the threshold of the old house with its severe hospitality! How, in my stupid vanity, I had tortured her!

Courageously, obstinately, this adorable girl, whose beauty even I had not appreciated, had kept her despised tenderness for me. Without a complaint, she had concealed her jealousy and accepted my confidences.

Poor, she had seen me throw away my fortune upon my own caprices and those of others. Sublime with sacrifice, with ideal passion, she had pretended to laugh at my mockery of her humdrum spirit. And I—I! had given her a ridiculous name!

The chill of my wet clothes recalled me to real life.

Now, I had no right to expose myself to being ill—my life belonged to another.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, as I hurried into dry clothes, "how many days of happiness, alas, have been lost!"

XVIII.

It was not until dinner-time that I saw my cousin again. She had been obliged to change her dress, and as her wardrobe was limited, the dear child was in full dress. Beautiful enough to turn the head of a king, she looked at me as she always did, with humble looks of love—which the object of it was supposed to ignore—to see if the master of her heart was pleased.

I turned away my eyes. They would have told her all, and for the moment I wished to be silent. No, not before witnesses—the first blush, the first joy of her sweet success must be for me alone. She must wait another hour. My darling! how long she had waited without hope!

Like all people with his disease, my father ate little and it was hard for him to see others eat.

I did not make him suffer much that day.

Saying nothing, I watched my cousin, or, to speak more exactly, I devoured her with my eyes, discovering treasures of charm and grace in the smallest movement of her hands, in her simplest attitudes. For two hours I had loved her with my whole mind and strength, but what I experienced was not in the least like the "love at first sight" described by novelists. During long years my happy destiny had slowly, patiently, prepared my heart for this moment. A gleam of light had come. Now the flame of true love burned brightly, never to go out.

When the repast was over I said to my cousin: "Let us go and see if the storm has done much harm to the trees of the park."

Ah! never to be forgotten evening! The sky was perfectly clear again, and there were only here and there some drops shining on the leaves, refreshed by the beneficent rain. The air was full of the odor of sap, a perfume of flowers awakened from their lethargy, and happy to revive. The entire park seemed an immense hall, decorated with fresh verdure for some great rejoicing for which the first stars began the illumination. I offered my arm to my companion, a gallantry to which she was little accustomed.

She took it without looking at me, nervous with a sort of vague presentiment, and we walked slowly in the direction of the famous plane-tree. It was there that I wanted to open my heart to her.

When we were under the big tree, I said to Rosie, not allowing her to sit down:

"I have found out why my lady of the pansies does not write to me any more."

"Really," she said, curious to know what false light I was following now, for she did not yet guess. "Why?"

"Because her letters, would bear the post-mark of Vandelnay. Do you understand, Rosie?"

She trembled, and bit her lips. Evidently, she was trying to think of some means of prolonging my error, but I resumed, putting my arm about her waist, which made her tremble violently.

"She will write no more, never more, Rosie! My darling, tell me with your lips what your pen has told me. For my lady of the pansies, I am sure of it, is here on my heart!"

Without hesitating, in a low voice, she said the dear words, and the birds in the thick

branches over our heads seemed to be silent to listen.

"Is it really true?" I asked in a moment. "You have written me so much that was false!"

"Never a word! I have always told you the truth."

"What can you mean? And the aristocratic *salon* where we have met, for instance?"

"Is not that true of Vandelnay?"

"But the mysterious and jealous being to whom you belonged, and the duties which bound you? I supposed you were irrevocably married, and mother of a family — and you helped me to believe it."

"Is not my grandfather more than husband or children—this old man of eighty years, who has only me in the world, who has devoted his life to me, and to whom I owe everything?"

"And this fear of showing yourself to me? Would you really have had the courage to live and die without telling me your secret?"

"At first I thought I could, but lately I have wavered. I would have told you when I was an old woman."

"And why so, I beg?"

"Because I am very distrustful by nature, and certainly your confidences were not reassuring; because I thought you incapable of understanding me; because you did not take the trouble to look at me. And, last of all — she lowered her voice — because I am very proud."

"Rosie," I replied, "you must be completely generous. Do me the kindness to forget all these miserable reasons. At the bottom of my heart—I swear—I have never loved but you."

"At the bottom!" she sighed, concealing her eyes, in which the bright drops stood, on my breast. "Ah! yes, deep down, then! For if I could judge by the surface—"

"I adore you. There is no other woman in the world for me. Besides, you know whether I have been faithful."

"For three months! A great thing!"

"Yes, but without knowing you. Now I know you. You have every quality—heart, soul, devotion, tenderness—"

"Are you not ashamed? Do you remember the name you gave me?"

"Hush! I had not read your letters, then.

And besides, Rosie, you are so beautiful! I admire you as much as I love you. What happiness that my lady of the pansies is no other than you!"

A pressure of her little hand emphasized these words, as much as to say that she also was happy, the dear, loving creature.

We remained during long minutes silent. Suddenly she started from the arms which held her gently imprisoned.

"But who can have told you my secret?" she cried, knitting her brows. "No human being knows it."

"Come," I said. "The air is damp. As we go you shall hear the story."

When I had finished my short history of my pursuit after the leaf of blotting-paper carried away by the wind, she said, in a voice which was at once gentle and profound:

"How good God is!"

"Yes, there are days when he is good, others when he seems cruel!"

We had reached the steps of the house, when I perceived that we had forgotten something very important, like foolish architects who build the house forgetting the staircase.

"Rosie," I said, "we will go and announce the great news to them."

One of her traits of character was to disguise easily her deep emotions. She asked, with a careless air:

"What great news?"

"That you have promised to be my wife."

She no longer feigned indifference. She took my hands, and looking me full in the face, "My dear," she said, "I belong to you. Speak as you will, and when you will. Grandfather will be very happy, for I am sure that he too has had his secret."

My father put down his newspaper when he saw us come in. My mother was writing; my Uncle John had retired to the little tower as he was in the habit of doing. He went early to bed.

"Well," asked my father, "has the storm done much damage to my trees?"

"Not much," I said; "but if it had even uprooted the plane-tree, we ought still to be grateful to it."

My parents looked at me astonished at my emotion.

"Will you have this dear child for your daughter?"

We all embraced each other, during I do not know how many minutes, without being able to speak, so that when we recovered our voices there was nothing more to say.

From henceforth the orphan was at home in the house where she was to grow old, but differently from Aunt Frederick and Aunt Alexandrine.

When my father and his happy son were alone:

"You pretended, the other day," he said, "that your cousin was hardly a woman for you. It seems to me that the change has been rather sudden, and, as I think of it, everybody seems to have been rather precipitate, even the reasonable people. But this little fairy has turned my head too, and I did not reflect—and you are so young."

I interrupted this retrospective prudence to tell my father the story of Miss Cinderella, and of my lady of the pansies.

"My son," he said, getting up—for it was late—"I only desire one thing; it is that you may do for your wife as much as she has done

for you. I can hardly wait for to-morrow morning to go and talk of this affair with my Uncle John."

In the morning, when I was going to throw myself on my Uncle John's neck to thank him for his favorable answer, he threw on me a look almost of fear, which carried me back thirteen years. For it was with such timid, supplicating eyes that he had looked at my grandmother on the evening when he begged to have the fatherless, motherless child received at Vandelnay.

"Are you sure you love her very much," he asked me. "You must never deceive her. You do not realize what an immense love my Rosie has for you! I guessed it long ago, and I have suffered for her. Even now I am frightened; she has such a deep tenderness for you! You hold her life in your hand—and mine, too, so long as I am here."

I kneeled before my cousin and kissed her hand as I made my reply, which seemed to content my uncle:

"Uncle John, you may be perfectly happy."

'Lisbeth went back alone to the Rue d'Assas to give up the apartment. Then she returned

for the marriage of her young mistress. Two months later she married the gardener, as I have already said—remarkable person as he was.

When I shall be no more, my son will find these pages, which will show him how much I loved the mother whom he knew for so short a time—with whom, as I have written, I have seemed to live our happy days over again.

For—*she did not grow old at Vandelnay!*

In our projects, in our happiness, in the forgetfulness of the outer world, which the union of our lives brought us, it did not occur to us that death could accomplish the terrible work he did—to take this loving creature—

How many times I have been forced to put down my pen as I remembered those smiles, those joys! The dear absent one has seen it. She knows how much I loved her, how often I weep for her when I am alone, what thought never leaves me, when the living think that my mind, as well as my body, is among them.

And so that the precious remembrance may

remain after we shall be united, I have piously set it down in these pages, as one preserves under gold and crystal from the least destructive breath of wind, the flower which tells of short moments of joy, forever past.

THE END.

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